Snake and Serpent Husbands

folktales of type 433C
and related stories

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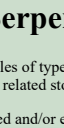
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The Enchanted Brahman's Son

India. *The Panchatantra*

In the city of Radschagriha there lived a Brahman by the name of Devasarman. His childless wife wept bitterly whenever she saw the neighbors' children. One day the Brahman said to her, "Dear one, stop your grieving. Behold, I was offering a sacrifice for the birth of a son when an invisible being said to me in the clearest words, 'Brahman, you shall be granted this son, and he shall surpass all men in beauty and virtue, and good fortune shall be his.'"

After hearing this, the Brahman's wife was overjoyed, and she said, "Such promises must come true." In the course of time she became pregnant and gave birth to a snake. When her attendants saw it, they all cried out, "Throw it away!" However, she paid no attention to them, but instead picked it up, had it bathed, and -- filled with a mother's love toward her son -- laid it in a large, clean container, fed it milk, fresh butter, and the like, so that within a few days it had reached its full growth.

Once when the Brahman's wife witnessed the wedding feast of a neighbor's son, her eyes clouded over with tears, and she said to her husband, "You treat me with contempt, because you are not making any effort at all to arrange a wedding for my dear child!"

When he heard this, the Brahman said, "Honored one! To achieve that I would have to go to the depths of hell and beseech Pasuki, the King of Snakes, for who else, you fool, would give his daughter in marriage to a snake?"

Having said this, he looked at his wife with her exceedingly sad face, and -- for the sake of her love and in order to pacify her -- he took some travel provisions and departed for a foreign land. After traveling about for several months he came to a place by the name of Kukutanagara. There, as evening fell, he was received by an acquaintance, a member of his caste. He was given a bath, food, and every necessity, and he spent the night there.

The next morning he took leave and was preparing to set forth once again, when his host said, "What brought you to this place, and where are you going now?"

The Brahman answered, "I have come to seek an appropriate bride for my son."

After hearing this, the host said, "If that is the case, then I have a very appropriate daughter. I have only respect for you. Take her for your son!" Acting upon these words, the Brahman took the girl, together with her servants, and returned to his home city. However, when the inhabitants of this region saw the girl, who was beautiful, gifted, and charming beyond comparison, they opened their eyes wide with love for her, and said to her attendants, "How could you deliver such a jewel of a girl to a snake?"

After hearing this, all of her companions were horrified, and they said, "She must be rescued from the murderer set up by this old Brahman."

Hearing this, the maiden said, "Spare me from such deception, for behold:

> Kings speak but once. The virtuous speak but once. A girl is promised in marriage but once. These three things happen but once.

And further:

> Not even wise men and gods can change the decrees of fate.

And moreover, my father shall not be reproached for his daughter's falseness."

Having said that, and with the permission of her attendants, she married the snake. She showed him proper respect, and served him milk and similar things.

One night the snake left his large basket, which was kept in the bedroom, and climbed into his wife's bed. She cried out, "Who is this creature, shaped like a man?"

Thinking it was a strange man, she jumped up. Shaking all over, she tore open the door and wanted to rush away, when the snake said, "Dear one! Stay here! I am your husband!" To convince her of this, he once again entered the body that he had left in the basket, then left it again. He was wearing a magnificent diadem, rings, bands, and bracelets on his upper and lower arms. His wife fell at his feet. Then together they partook of the joys of love.

His father, the Brahman, had arisen earlier than his son, and saw everything. He took the snake skin, which was lying in the basket, and burned it in the fire, saying, "He shall not enter it again." Later that morning, filled with joy, he presented his son to his family. Vitalized by unending love, he became an ideal son.

- Source: "Der verzauberte Brahmanensohn," *Pantschatantra: Fünf Bücher indischer Fabeln, Märchen und Erzählungen*, vol. 2, translated from the Sanskrit into German by Theodor Benfey, (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1859), appendix to book 1, story 8, pp. 144-48.
- Translation © 1998 by D. L. Ashliman.
- India's most influential contribution to world literature, the *Panchatantra* (also spelled *Pañcatantra* or *Pañca-tantra*) consists of five books of animal fables and magic tales (some 87 stories in all) that were compiled, in their current form, between the third and fifth centuries AD. It is believed that even then the stories were already ancient. The tales' self-proclaimed purpose is to educate the sons of royalty. Although the original author's or compiler's name is unknown, an Arabic translation from about 750 AD attributes the *Panchatantra* to a wise man called Bidpai, which is probably a Sanskrit word meaning "court scholar." The fables of the *Panchatantra* found their way to Europe through oral folklore channels and by way of Persian and Arabic translations. They substantially influenced medieval writers of fables.
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Muchie-Lal

India

Once upon a time there were a rajah [king] and ranee [queen] who had no children. Long had they wished and prayed that the gods would send them a son, but it was all in vain; their prayers were not granted.

One day a number of fish were brought into the royal kitchen to be cooked for the rajah's dinner, and amongst them was one little fish that was not dead; but all the rest were dead. One of the palace maid-servants seeing this, took the little fish and put him in a basin of water. Shortly afterwards the ranee saw him, and thinking him very pretty, kept him as a pet; and because she had no children she lavished all her affection on the fish, and loved him as a son; and the people called him Muchie-Rajah (the fish prince).

In a little while Muchie-Rajah had grown too long to live in the small basin, so they put him in a larger one; and then (when he grew too long for that) into a big tub. In time, however, Muchie-Rajah became too large for even the big tub to hold him; so the ranee had a tank made for him in which he lived very happily, and twice a day she fed him with boiled rice.

Now, though the people fancied Muchie-Rajah was only a fish, this was not the case. He was, in truth, a young rajah who had angered the gods, and been by them turned into a fish and thrown into the river, as a punishment.

One morning, when the ranee brought him his daily meal of boiled rice, Muchie-Rajah called out to her and said, "Queen Mother, Queen Mother, I am so lonely here all by myself. Cannot you get me a wife?"

The ranee promised to try, and sent messengers to all the people she knew, to ask if they would allow one of their children to marry her son, the fish prince. But they all answered, "We cannot give one of our dear little daughters to be devoured by a great fish, even though he is the Muchie-Rajah, and so high in your majesty's favor."

At news of this the ranee did not know what to do. She was so foolishly fond of Muchie-Rajah, however, that she resolved to get him a wife at any cost. Again she sent out messengers; but this time she gave them a great bag containing a lac [100,000] of gold mohurs, and said to them, "Go into every land until you find a wife for my Muchie-Rajah, and to whoever will give you a child to be the Muchie-Ranee, you shall give this bag of gold mohurs."

The messengers started on their search, but for some time they were unsuccessful; not even the beggars were to be tempted to sell their children, fearing the great fish would devour them.

At last one day the messengers came to a village where there lived a fakir, who had lost his first wife and married again. His first wife had had one little daughter, and his second wife also had a daughter. As it happened, the fakir's second wife hated her little stepdaughter, always gave her the hardest work to do, and the least food to eat, and tried by every means in her power to get her out of the way, in order that the child might not rival her own daughter.

When she heard of the errand on which the messengers had come, she sent for them when the fakir was out, and said to them, "Give me the bag of gold mohurs and you shall take my little daughter to marry the Muchie-Rajah" (for, she thought to herself, "The great fish will certainly eat the girl, and she will thus trouble us no more").

Then, turning to her stepdaughter, she said, "Go down to the river and wash your sari, that you may be fit to go with these people, who will take you to the ranee's court."

At these words the poor girl went down to the river very sorrowful, for she saw no hope of escape, as her father was from home. As she knelt by the riverside, washing her sari and crying bitterly, some of her tears fell into the hole of an ol seven-headed cobra, who lived in the river bank.

This cobra was a very wise animal, and seeing the maiden, he put his head out of his hole, and said to her, "Little girl, why do you cry?"

"Oh, sir," she answered, "I am very unhappy, for my father is from home, and my stepmother has sold me to the ranee's people to be the wife of the Muchie-Rajah, that great fish, and I know he will eat me up."

"Do not be afraid, my daughter," said the cobra, "but take with you these three stones and tie them up in the corner of your sari," and so saying he gave her three little round pebbles. "The Muchie-Rajah, whose wife you are to be, is not really a fish, but a rajah who has been enchanted. Your home will be a little room which the ranee has had built in the tank wall. When you are taken there, wait, and be sure you don't go to sleep, or the Muchie-Rajah will certainly come and eat you up. But as you hear him coming rushing through the water, be prepared, and as soon as you see him throw this first stone at him; he will then sink to the bottom of the tank. The second time he comes, throw the second stone, when the same thing will happen. The third time he comes, throw this third stone, and he will immediately resume his human shape."

So saying, the old cobra dived down again into his hole. The fakir's daughter took the stones, and determined to do as the cobra had told her, though she hardly believed it would have the desired effect.

When she reached the palace, the ranee spoke kindly to her, and said to the messengers, "You have done your errand well -- this is a dear little girl."

Then she ordered that she should be let down the side of the tank in a basket, to a little room which had been prepared for her. When the fakir's daughter got there, she thought she had never seen such a pretty place in her life (for the ranee had caused the little room to be very nicely decorated for the wife of her favorite), and she would have felt very happy away from her cruel stepmother and all the hard work she had been made to do, had it not been for the dark water that lay black and unfathomable below the door, and the fear of the terrible Muchie-Rajah.

After waiting some time she heard a rushing sound, and little waves came dashing against the threshold; faster they came and faster, and the noise got louder and louder, until she saw a great fish's head above the water -- the Muchie-Rajah was coming towards her open-mouthed. The fakir's daughter seized one of the stones that the cobra had given her, and threw it at him, and down he sank to the bottom of the tank; a second time he rose and came towards her, and she threw the second stone at him, and he again sank down; a third time he came more fiercely than before, when, seizing the third stone she threw it with all her force. No sooner did it touch him than the spell was broken, and there, instead of a fish stood a handsome young prince.

The poor little fakir's daughter was so startled that she began to cry. But the prince said to her, "Pretty maiden, do not be frightened. You have rescued me from a horrible thralldom, and I can never thank you enough; but if you will be the Muchie-Ranee, we will be married tomorrow."

Then he sat down on the doorstep, thinking over his strange fate, and watching for the dawn.

Next morning early, several inquisitive people came to see if the Muchie-Rajah had eaten up his poor little wife, as they feared he would; what was their astonishment, on looking over the tank wall, to see, not the Muchie Rajah, but a magnificent prince! The news soon spread to the palace. Down came the rajah, down came the ranee, down came all their attendants and dragged Muchie-Rajah and the fakir's daughter up the side of the tank in a basket; and when they heard their story, there were great and unparalleled rejoicings.

The ranee said, "So I have indeed found a son at last."

And the people were so delighted, so happy, and proud of the new prince and princess, that they covered all their path with damask from the tank to the palace, and cried to their fellows, "Come and see our new prince and princess. Were ever any so divinely beautiful? Come; see a right royal couple! A pair of mortals like the gods!"

And when they reached the palace the prince was married to the fakir's daughter.

There they lived very happily for some time. The Muchie-Ranee's stepmother, hearing what had happened, came often to see her stepdaughter, and pretended to be delighted at her good fortune; and the ranee was so good that she quite forgave all her stepmother's former cruelty, and always received her very kindly.

At last, one day, the Muchie-Ranee said to her husband, "It is a weary while since I saw my father. If you will give me leave, I should much like to visit my native village and see him again."

"Very well," he replied, "you may go. But do not stay away long; for there can be no happiness for me till you return."

So she went, and her father was delighted to see her; but her stepmother, though she pretended to be very kind, was, in reality, only glad to think she had got the ranee into her power, and determined, if possible, never to allow her to return to the palace again.

One day, therefore, she said to her own daughter, "It is hard that your stepsister should have become ranee of all the land, instead of being eaten up by the great fish, while we gained no more than a lac of gold mohurs. Do now as I bid you, that you may become ranee in her stead."

She then went on to instruct her how that she must invite the ranee down to the river bank, and there beg her to let you try on her jewels, and whilst putting them on, give her a push and drown her in the river.

The girl consented, and standing by the river bank said to her stepsister, "Sister, may I try on your jewels -- how pretty they are."

"Yes," said the ranee, "and we shall be able to see in the river how they look."

So, undoing her necklaces she clasped them round the other's neck; but whilst she was doing so, her stepsister gave her a push, and she fell backwards into the water. The girl watched to see that the body did not rise, and then running back to her mother, "Mother, here are all the jewels; and she will trouble us no more."

But it happened that just when her stepsister pushed the ranee into the river, her old friend the seven-headed cobra chanced to be swimming across it, and seeing the little ranee like to be drowned, he carried her on his back until he reached his hole, into which he took her safely.

Now this hole, in which the cobra and his wife, and all his little ones lived, had two entrances -- the one under water, and leading to the river, and the other above water, leading out into the open fields. To this upper end of his hole the cobra took the Muchie-Ranee, and there he and his wife took care of her; and there she lived with them for some time.

Meanwhile, the wicked fakir's wife, having dressed up her own daughter in all the ranee's jewels, took her to the palace, and said to the Muchie-Rajah, "See, I have brought your wife, my dear daughter, back safe and well."

The rajah looked at her, and thought, "This does not look like my wife."

However, the room was dark, and the girl was cleverly disguised, and he thought he might be mistaken. Next day he said again, "My wife must be sadly changed, or this cannot be she; for she was always bright and cheerful. She had pretty loving ways and merry words; while this woman never opens her lips." Still, he did not like to seem to mistrust his wife, and comforted himself by saying, "Perhaps she is tired with the long journey."

On the third day, however, he could bear the un certainty no longer, and tearing off her jewels, saw, not the face of his own little wife, but another woman. Then he was very angry, and turned her out of doors, saying, "Be gone; since you are but the wretched tool of others, I spare your life."

But of the fakir's wife he said to his guards, "Fetch that woman here instantly; for unless she can tell me where my wife is, I will have her hanged."

It chanced, however, that the fakir's wife had heard of the Muchie-Rajah having turned her daughter out of doors; so, fearing his anger, she hid herself, and was not to be found.

Meantime, the Muchie-Ranee, not knowing how to get home, continued to live in the great seven-headed cobra's hole, and he and his wife and all his family were very kind to her, and loved her as if she had been one of them; and there her little son was born, and she called him Muchie-Lal [little ruby fish], after the Muchie-Rajah, his father.

Muchie-Lal was a lovely child, merry and brave, and his playmates all day long were the young cobras. When he was about three years old, a bangle-seller came by that way, and the Muchie-Ranee bought some bangles from him and put them on her boy's wrists and ankles; but by next day, in playing, he had broken them all. Then, seeing the bangle-seller, the ranee called him again and bought some more, and so on, every day, until the bangle-seller got quite rich from selling so many bangles for the Muchie-Lal; for the cobra's hole was full of treasure, and he gave the Muchie-Ranee as much money to spend every day as she liked. There was nothing she wished for he did not give her, only he would not let her try to get home to her husband, which she wished more than all.

When she asked him he would say, "No, I will not let you go. If your husband comes here and fetches you, it is well; but I will not allow you to wander in search of him through the land alone."

And so she was obliged to stay where she was. All this time the poor Muchie-Rajah was hunting in every part of the country for his wife, but he could learn no tidings of her. For grief and sorrow at losing her he had gone well nigh distracted, and did nothing but wander from place to place crying, "She is gone! She is gone!"

Then, when he had long inquired without avail of all the people in her native village about her, he one day met a bangle-seller, and said to him, "Whence do you come?"

The bangle-seller answered, "I have just been selling bangles to some people who live in a cobra's hole in the river bank."

"People! What people?" asked the rajah.

"Why," answered the bangle-seller, "a woman and a child -- the child is the most beautiful I ever saw. He is about three years old, and, of course, running about, is always breaking his bangles, and his mother buys him new ones every day."

"Do you know what the child's name is?" said the rajah.

"Yes," answered the bangle-seller carelessly, "for the lady always calls him her Muchie-Lal."

"Ah," thought the Muchie-Rajah, "this must be my wife."

Then he said to him again, "Good bangle-seller, I would see these strange people of whom you speak; cannot you take me there?"

"Not tonight," replied the bangle-seller; "daylight has gone, and we should only frighten them; but I shall be going there again tomorrow, and then you may come too. Meanwhile, come and rest at my house for the night, for you look faint and weary."

The rajah consented. Next morning, however, very early, he woke the bangle-seller, saying, "Pray let us go now and see the people you spoke about yesterday."

"Stay," said the bangle-seller; "it is much too early. I never go till after breakfast."

So the rajah had to wait till the bangle-seller was ready to go. At last they started off, and when they reached the cobra's hole, the first thing the rajah saw was a fine little boy playing with the young cobras.

As the bangle-seller came along, jingling his bangles, a gentle voice from inside the hole called out, "Come here, my Muchie-Lal, and try on your bangles."

Then the Muchie-Rajah, kneeling down at the mouth of the hole, said, "Oh, lady, show your beautiful face to me."

At the sound of his voice the ranee ran out, crying, "Husband, husband! Have you found me again?"

And she told him how her sister had tried to drown her, and how the good cobra had saved her life, and taken care of her and her child.

Then he said, "And will you now come home with me?"

And she told him how the cobra would never let her go, and said, "I will first tell him of your coming; for he has been as a father to me."

So she called out, " Father Cobra, Father Cobra, my husband has come to fetch me; will you let me go?"

"Yes," he said, "if your husband has come to fetch you, you may go."

And his wife said, "Farewell, dear lady, we are loth to lose you, for we have loved you as a daughter."

And all the little cobras were very sorrowful to think that they must lose their playfellow, the young prince.

Then the cobra gave the Muchie-Rajah and the Muchie-Ranee, and Muchie-Lal, all the most costly gifts he could find in his treasure-house; and so they went home, where they lived very happy ever after, and so may you be happy too.

- Source: M. Frere, *Old Deccan Days; or, Hindoo Fairy Legends Current in Southern India* (London: John Murray, 1868), no. 19, pp. 238-48.
- This tale combines type 433B (marriage with a snake) with type 403C (substituted bride).
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The Snake Prince

India

Once upon a time there lived by herself, in a city, an old woman who was desperately poor. One day she found that she had only a handful of flour left in the house, and no money to buy more nor hope of earning it. Carrying her little brass pot, very sadly she made her way down to the river to bathe and to obtain some water, thinking afterwards to come home and to make herself an unleavened cake of what flour she had left; and after that she did not know what was to become of her.

Whilst she was bathing she left her little brass pot on the river bank covered with a cloth, to keep the inside nice and clean; but when she came up out of the river and took the cloth off to fill the pot with water, she saw inside it the glittering folds of a deadly snake.

At once she popped the cloth again into the mouth of the pot and held it there; and then she said to herself: "Ah, kind death! I will take thee home to my house, and there I will shake thee out of my pot and thou shalt bite me and I will die, and then all my troubles will be ended."

With these sad thoughts in her mind the poor old woman hurried home, holding her cloth carefully in the mouth of the pot; and when she got home she shut all the doors and windows, and took away the cloth, and turned the pot upside down upon her hearthstone. What was her surprise to find that, instead of the deadly snake which she expected to see fall out of it, there fell out with a rattle and a clang a most magnificent necklace of flashing jewels!

For a few minutes she could hardly think or speak, but stood staring; and then with trembling hands she picked the necklace up, and folding it in the corner of her out her veil, she hurried off to the king's hall of public audience.

"A petition, O king!" she said. "A petition for thy private ear alone!"

And when her prayer had been granted, and she found herself alone with the king, she shook out her veil at his feet, and there fell from it in glittering coils the splendid necklace. As soon as the king saw it he was filled with amazement and delight; and the more he looked at it the more he felt that he must possess it at once. So he gave the old woman five hundred silver pieces for it, and put it straightway into his pocket. Away she went full of happiness; for the money that the king had given her was enough to keep her for the rest of her life.

As soon as he could leave his business the king hurried off and showed his wife his prize, with which she was as pleased as he, if not more so; and, as soon as they had finished admiring the wonderful necklace, they locked it up in the great chest where the queen's jewelry was kept, the key of which hung always round the king's neck.

A short while afterwards, a neighboring king sent a message to say that a most lovely girl baby had been born to him; and he invited his neighbors to come to a great feast in honor of the occasion. The queen told her husband that of course they must be present at the banquet, and she would wear the new necklace which he had given her. They had only a short time to prepare for the journey, and at the last moment the king went to the jewel chest to take out the necklace for his wife to wear, but he could see no necklace at all, only, in its place, a fat little boy baby crowing and shouting. The king was so astonished that he nearly fell backwards, but presently he found his voice, and called for his wife so loudly that she came running, thinking that the necklace must at least have been stolen.

"Look here! look!" cried the king, "haven't we always longed for a son? And now heaven has sent us one!"

"What do you mean?" cried the queen. "Are you mad?"

"Mad? no, I hope not," shouted the king, dancing in excitement round the open chest. "Come here, and look! Look what we've got instead of that necklace!"

Just then the baby let out a great crow of joy, as though he would like to jump up and dance with the king; and the queen gave a cry of surprise, and ran up and looked into the chest.

"Oh!" she gasped, as she looked at the baby, "what a darling! Where could he have come from?"

"I'm sure I can't say," said the king; "all I know is that we locked up a necklace in the chest, and when I unlocked it just now there was no necklace, but a baby, and as fine a baby as ever was seen."

By this time the queen had the baby in her arms. "Oh, the blessed one!" she cried, "fairer ornament for the bosom of a queen than any necklace that ever was wrought. Write," she continued, "write to our neighbor and say that we cannot come to his feast, for we have a feast of our own, and a baby of our own! Oh, happy day!"

So the visit was given up; and, in honor of the new baby, the bells of the city, and its guns, and its trumpets, and its people, small and great, had hardly any rest for a week; there was such a ringing, and banging, and blaring, and such fireworks, and feasting, and rejoicing, and merrymaking, as had never been seen before.

A few years went by; and, as the king's boy baby and his neighbor's girl baby grew and throve, the two kings arranged that as soon as they were old enough they should marry; and so, with much signing of papers and agreements, and wagging of wise heads, and stroking of grey beards, the compact was made, and signed, and sealed, and lay waiting for its fulfilment. And this too came to pass; for, as soon as the prince and princess were eighteen years of age, the kings agreed that it was time for the wedding; and the young prince journeyed away to the neighboring kingdom for his bride, and was there married to her with great and renewed rejoicings.

Now, I must tell you that the old woman who had sold the king the necklace had been called in by him to be the nurse of the young prince; and although she loved her charge dearly, and was a most faithful servant, she could not help talking just a little, and so, by-and-by, it began to be rumored that there was some magic about the young prince's birth; and the rumor of course had come in due time to the ears of the parents of the princess.

So now that she was going to be the wife of the prince, her mother (who was curious, as many other people are) said to her daughter on the eve of the ceremony: "Remember that the first thing you must do is to find out what this story is about the prince. And in order to do it, you must not speak a word to him whatever he says until he asks you why you are silent; then you must ask him what the truth is about his magic birth; and until he tells you, you must not speak to him again."

And the princess promised that she would follow her mother's advice. Therefore when they were married, and the prince spoke to his bride, she did not answer him. He could not think what was the matter, but even about her old home she would not utter a word.

At last he asked why she would not speak; and then she said: "Tell me the secret of your birth."

Then the prince was very sad and displeased, and although she pressed him sorely he would not tell her, but always reply: "If I tell you, you will repent that ever you asked me."

For several months they lived together; and it was not such a happy time for either as it ought to have been, for the secret was still a secret, and lay between them like a cloud between the sun and the earth, making what should be fair, dull and sad.

At length the prince could bear it no longer; so he said to his wife one day: "At midnight I will tell you my secret if you still wish it; but you will repent it all your life."

However, the princess was overjoyed that she had succeeded, and paid no attention to his warnings. That night the prince ordered horses to be ready for the princess and himself a little before midnight. He placed her on one, and mounted the other himself, and they rode together down to the river to the place where the old woman had first found the snake in her brass pot.

There the prince drew rein and said sadly: "Do you still insist that I should tell you my secret?"

And the princess answered "Yes."

"If I do," answered the prince, "remember that you will regret it all your life."

But the princess only replied "Tell me!"

"Then," said the prince, "know that I am the son of the king of a far country, but by enchantment I was turned into a snake." The word "snake" was hardly out of his lips when he disappeared, and the princess heard a rustle and saw a ripple on the water; and in the faint moonlight she beheld a snake swimming into the river. Soon it disappeared and she was left alone. In vain she waited with beating heart for something to happen, and for the prince to come back to her. Nothing happened and no one came; only the wind mourned through the trees on the river bank, and the night birds cried, and a jackal howled in the distance, and the river flowed black and silent beneath her.

In the morning they found her, weeping and disheveled, on the river bank; but no word could they learn from her or from anyone as to the fate of her husband. At her wish they built on the river bank a little house of black stone; and there she lived in mourning, with a few servants and guards to watch over her.

A long, long time passed by, and still the princess lived in mourning for her prince, and saw no one, and went nowhere away from her house on the river bank and the garden that surrounded it.

One morning, when she woke up, she found a stain of fresh mud upon the carpet. She sent for the guards, who watched outside the house day and night, and asked them who had entered her room while she was asleep. They declared that no one *could* have entered, for they kept such careful watch that not even a bird could fly in without their knowledge; but none of them could explain the stain of mud. The next morning, again, the princess found another stain of wet mud, and she questioned everyone most carefully; but none could say how the mud came there. The third night the princess determined to lie awake herself and watch; and, for fear that she might fall asleep, she cut her finger with a penknife and rubbed salt into the cut, that the pain of it might keep her from sleeping.

So she lay awake, and at midnight she saw a snake come wriggling along the ground with some mud from the river in its mouth; and when it came near the bed, it reared up its head and dropped its muddy head on the bedclothes.

She was very frightened, but tried to control her fear, and called out: "Who are you, and what do you here?"

And the snake answered: "I am the prince, your husband, and I am come to visit you."

Then the princess began to weep; and the snake continued: "Alas! did I not say that if I told you my secret you would repent it? and have you not repented?"

"Oh, indeed!" cried the poor princess, "I have repented it, and shall repent it all my life! Is there nothing I can do?"

And the snake answered: "Yes, there is one thing, if you dared to do it."

"Only tell me," said the princess, "and I will do *anything!*"

"Then," replied the snake, "on a certain night you must put a large bowl of milk and sugar in each of the four corners of this room. All the snakes in the river will come out to drink the milk, and the one that leads the way will be the queen of the snakes. You must stand in her way at the door, and say: 'Oh, Queen of Snakes, Queen of Snakes, give me back my husband!' and perhaps she will do it. But if you are frightened, and do not stop her, you will never see me again." And he glided away.

On the night of which the snake had told her, the princess got four large bowls of milk and sugar, and put one in each corner of the room, and stood in the doorway waiting. At midnight there was a great hissing and rustling from the direction of the river, and presently the ground appeared to be alive with horrible writhing forms of snakes, whose eyes glittered and forked tongues quivered as they moved on in the direction of the princess's house. Foremost among them was a huge, repulsive scaly creature that led the dreadful procession. The guards were so terrified that they all ran away; but the princess stood in the doorway, as white as the snakes raised their horrid heads and swayed them to and fro, and looked at her with wicked beady eyes, while their breath seemed to poison the very air.

Still the princess stood firm, and, when the leading snake was within a few feet of her, she cried: "Oh, Queen of Snakes, Queen of Snakes, give me back my husband!"

Then all the rustling, writhing crowd of snakes seemed to whisper to one another "Her husband? her husband?"

But the queen of snakes moved on until her head was almost in the princess's face, and her little eyes seemed to flash fire.

And still the princess stood in the doorway and never moved, but cried again: "Oh, Queen of Snakes, Queen of Snakes, give me back my husband!"

Then the queen of snakes replied: "Tomorrow you shall have him -- tomorrow!"

When she heard these words and knew that she had conquered, the princess staggered from the door, and sank upon her bed and fainted. As in a dream, she saw that her room was full of snakes, all jostling and squabbling over the bowls of milk until it was finished. And then they went away.

In the morning the princess was up early, and took off the mourning dress which she had worn for five whole years, and put on gay and beautiful clothes. And she swept the house and cleaned it, and adorned it with garlands and nosegays of sweet flowers and ferns, and prepared it as though she were making ready for her wedding. And when night fell she lit up the woods and gardens with lanterns, and spread a table as for a feast, and lit in the house a thousand wax candles. Then she waited for her husband, not knowing in what shape he would appear. And at midnight there came striding from the river the prince, laughing, but with tears in his eyes; and she ran to meet him, and threw herself into his arms, crying and laughing too.

So the prince came home; and the next day they two went back to the palace, and the old king wept with joy to see them. And the bells, so long silent, were set a-ringing again, and the guns firing, and the trumpets blaring, and there was fresh feasting and rejoicing. And the old woman who had been the prince's nurse became nurse to the prince's children -- at least she was called so; though she was far too old to do anything for them but love them. Yet she still thought that she was useful, and knew that she was happy. And happy, indeed, were the prince and princess, who in due time became king and queen, and lived and ruled long and prosperously.

- Source: Andrew Lang, *The Olive Fairy Book* (New York, London, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1907), pp. 247-55.
- Lang's source: "Major Campbell, Feroshepore."
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The Caterpillar Boy

India

Once there was an old woman who lived on the grain she could collect from other people's threshing floors. One day as she swept up a threshing floor she found a caterpillar among the paddy; she threw it away but it came crawling back again.

She threw it away again, but it said, "Do not throw me away, take me home with you and you will prosper."

So she let it stay and that day she found that she collected a whole basketful of rice; at this she was delighted, and put the caterpillar on the top of her basket and took it home. There she asked the caterpillar what work it would do, and it said that it would watch the paddy, while it was spread out to dry after being boiled, and prevent the fowls and pigs from eating it.

So the caterpillar used to watch the paddy while the old woman went out looking for food; and every day she brought back a full basket of rice, and so she soon became rich. It got whispered about that the old woman was so prosperous; because she had a caterpillar boy in her house.

One day the caterpillar said that he wanted to go and bathe, so he went to the river and took off his caterpillar skin, and bathed, and as he rubbed his head, one or two hairs came out, and these he wrapped up in a leaf and set the packet to float down the stream.

Lower down the stream a princess was bathing and when she saw the packet come floating down, she had it fished out, and when she opened it she saw the hairs inside and she measured them and found them to be twelve fathoms long; then the princess vowed that she would not eat rice, till she found the man to whom the hairs belonged. And she went home and shut herself in her room and refused to eat.

At this her father and mother were much distressed, and when they heard what had happened the raja said, "Well she wants a husband, I will find him for her." And he sent a notice throughout his kingdom saying that he would give his daughter and half his kingdom to the man who had hair twelve fathoms long.

Everyone who heard this came with his sons and the princess was told to look at them and choose whom she liked; but none had hair twelve fathoms long, and she would take none of them. Then the raja asked whether everyone in the kingdom had come, and he was told that there was a caterpillar boy, who lived with an old woman, who had not come, so the raja sent to fetch him, but he said that he had no arms or legs and could not go; so they sent a palki for him and he was brought in that. And when the palki was set on the ground, the caterpillar boy rolled out and the princess said that he should be her husband.

At this her father and mother were much ashamed and remonstrated with her, but she persisted in her fancy, so the marriage took place. They sent the newly married pair to live in a house at the outskirts of the village and only one maidservant accompanied the princess.

Every night the caterpillar boy used to take off his skin and go out to dance, and one night the maidservant saw him and told her mistress. And they agreed to watch him, so the next night they pretended to go to sleep, but when the caterpillar boy went out, they took his skin and burnt it on the fire; and when he came back, he looked for it, but could not find it. Then the princess got up and caught him in her arms, and he retained his human form. So she was glad and he was as handsome as a god.

In the morning the caterpillar boy and his wife stayed inside the house, and the raja sent some children to see what had happened, and the children brought back word that there was a being in the house, but whether human or divine they could not say.

Then the raja went and fetched his son-in-law to the palace, but the caterpillar was not pleased and said to his wife, "They treat me very well now that they see that I am a man, but what did they do before?" However he stayed in his father in-law's palace.

Presently the raja said that his kingdom was too small to give half of it to his son-in-law, so he proposed that they should go and conquer fresh territory, and carve out a kingdom for the caterpillar boy. So they went to war and attacked another raja, but they were defeated and their army cut to pieces. Then the son-in-law said that he would fight himself; so he drew his sword and brandished it and it flashed like lightning and dazzled the eyes of the enemy and his shield clanged on his thigh with a noise like thunder; and he defeated the other raja and took his kingdom and carried off all his wealth.

But the raja thought that as his son-in-law was so strong, he would one day kill him also and take his kingdom, so he resolved to find a means to kill him. On their way back from the war they found no water on the road and were distressed with thirst. One day they came to a large tank and found it dry. So they made a sacrifice in the hopes that water would flow. First they sacrificed goats and sang:

> Tank, we are giving goats
> Trickle out water!
> Tank, we are giving goats
> Flow, water!

But no water came. Then in succession they sacrificed sheep, and oxen and buffaloes, and horses and elephants, but all in vain; and after each failure the raja said, "Son-in-law, it is your turn," and at last his son-in-law said, "Well, let it be me;" and he armed himself and mounted his horse and went and stood in the middle of the tank, and he sang:

> Up to my knees the water, father,
> The water, father, has oozed out.

And the raja answered, "Do you, my son, remain standing there."

And as he sang the water welled out up to his horse's knee and then to its belly; and he still sang and the water rose to the horse's back and then to his own waist, and to his chest, and he still sang, and it reached his mouth and then he was completely submerged and the tank was full.

Then they all drank their fill and the raja said to his men, "We have sacrificed this Saru Prince. I will kill any of you who tells my daughter what has happened" and they promised not to tell, but they forgot that there were two dogs with them.

And when they got home each man's wife brought out water and welcomed him and the princess asked where her husband, the Saru Prince, was, and no one answered; then she sang:

> Oh Father, my father; How far away
> Is the Saru Prince, the Gindu Raja?

And the raja answered, "My daughter, my darling, the Saru Prince, the Gindu Raja is very far away, amusing himself with hunting."

And she sang to them all, but no one told her anything, and then she sang to the two dogs, who were named Chaura and Bhaura:

> Oh Chaura, oh Bhaura,
> How far away
> Is the Saru Prince, the Gindu Raja?"

And they answered:

> Oh sister, oh Rani!
> Your father has sacrificed him
> In the big tank.

Thereupon she began to cry, and every day she sat and cried on the bank of the tank.

Now the two daughters of the Snake King and Queen had received the Saru Prince as he disappeared under the water, and when they heard the princess crying every day they had pity on her; she used to sing:

> Oh husband! Oh raja!
> My father has sacrificed you
> In the big tank.
> Oh husband! Oh raja,
> Take me with you too.

So the daughters of the Snake King and Queen took pity on her and told their frog chowkidar [watchman or gatekeeper] to restore the Saru Prince to his wife; and the prince and his wife went home together.

When the raja and his wife saw their son-in-law again, they were terrified, but he said nothing to reproach them. The princess however could not forgive them for trying to kill her husband and always looked angrily at them; then the raja and the rani took counsel together and agreed that they had done wrong to the prince, and that he must be a magician; and they thought that their daughter must also be a magician, as she had recognized the prince when he was a caterpillar and she could not even see his long hair; so they were afraid and thought it best to make over the kingdom to their son-in-law, and they abdicated in his favor, and he took the kingdom.

- Source: Cecil Henry Bompas *Folklore of the Santal Parganas* (London: David Nutt, 1909), , no. 75, pp. 227-32.
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The River Snake

India, Cecil Henry Bompas

Once upon a time a certain woman had been on a visit to a distant village. As she was going home she reached the bank of a flooded river. She tried to wade across but soon found that the water was too deep and the current too strong. She looked about but could see no signs of a boat or any means of crossing. It began to grow dark, and the woman was in great distress at the thought that she would not be able to reach her home.

While she thus stood in doubt, suddenly out of the river came a great snake and said to her, "Woman, what will you give me if I ferry you across the river?"

She answered, "Snake, I have nothing to give you."

The snake said, "I cannot take you across the river unless you promise to give me something."

Now the woman at the time was pregnant and not knowing what else to do, she promised that when her child was born, if it were a daughter she would marry her to the river snake, and if it were a son that, when the boy grew up he should become the *juri* or "name friend" of the snake. The woman swore to do this with an oath, and the snake took her on his back and bore her safely across the flooded stream.

The woman safely reached her home, and in a little time a daughter was born to her.

Years passed away, and the woman forgot all about the snake and her oath. One day she went to the river to fetch water, and the snake came out of the stream and said to her, "Woman, where is the wife whom you promised to me?"

The women then remembered her oath, and going back to her house she returned to the river with her daughter. When the girl came to the bank of the river, the snake seized her and drew her underneath the water, and her mother saw her no more. The girl lived with the snake at the bottom of the river, and in the course of years bore him four snake sons.

Afterwards the girl remembered her home, and one day she went to visit her mother. Her brothers when they came home were astonished to see her and said, "Sister, we thought that you were drowned in the river."

She answered, "No, I was not drowned, but I am married and have children."

The brothers said, "Where is this brother-in-law of ours?"

Their sister said, "Go to the river and call him."

So they went to the river and called, and the snake came up out of the water and went to their house with them. Then they welcomed the snake and gave him great quantities of rice beer to drink. After drinking this the snake became sleepy and coiling himself in great coils went to sleep. Then the brothers who did not like a snake brother-in-law took their axes and cut off the head of the snake while he slept, and afterwards their sister lived in their house.

- Source: Cecil Henry Bompas, *Folklore of the Santal Parganas* (London: David Nutt, 1909), pp. 452-53.
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The Snake Who Became the King's Son-in-Law

Romanian-Gypsy

There were an old man and an old woman. From their youth up to their old age they had never had any, children (lit. "made any children of their bones"). So the old women was always scolding with the old man -- what can they do, for there they are old, old people?

The old woman said, "Who will look after us when we grow older still?"

"Well, what am I to do, old woman?"

"Go you, old man, and find a son for us."

So the old man arose in the morning, and took his axe in his hand, and departed and journeyed till midday, and came into a forest, and sought three days and found nothing. Then the old man could do no more for hunger. He set out to return home. So as he was coming back, he found a little snake and put it in a handkerchief, and carried it home. And he brought up the snake on sweet milk. The snake grew a week and two days, and he put it in a jar. The time came when the snake grew as big as the jar.

The snake talked with his father, "My time has come to marry me. Go, father, to the king, and ask his daughter for me."

When the old man heard that the snake wants the king's daughter, he smote himself with his hands. "Woe is me, darling! How can I go to the king? For the king will kill me."

What said he? "Go, father, and fear not. For what he wants of you, that will I give him."

The old man went to the king. "All hail, O king!"

"Thank you, old man."

"King, I am come to form an alliance by marriage."

"An alliance by marriage!" said the king. "You are a peasant, and I am a king."

"That matters not, O king. If you will give me your daughter, I will give you whatever you want."

What said the king? "Old man, if that be so, see this great forest. Fell it all, and make it a level field; and plough it for me, and break up all the earth; and sow it with millet by tomorrow. And mark well what I tell you: you must bring me a cake made with sweet milk. Then will I give you the maiden."

Said the old man, "All right, O king."

The old man went weeping to the snake.

When the snake saw his father weeping he said, "Why weepest thou, father?"

"How should I not weep, darling? For see what the king said, that I must fell this great forest, and sow millet; and it must grow up by tomorrow, and be ripe. And I must make a cake with sweet milk and give it him. Then he will give me his daughter."

What said the snake? "Father, don't fear for that, for I will do what you have told me."

The old man: "All right, darling, if you can manage it."

The old man went off to bed. What did the snake? He arose and made the forest a level plain, and sowed millet, and thought and thought, and it was grown up by daybreak. When the old man got up, he finds a sack of millet, and he made a cake with sweet milk.

The old man took the cake and went to the king. "Here, O king, I have done your bidding."

When the king saw that, he marveled. "My old fellow, hearken to me. I have one thing more for you to do. Make me a golden bridge from my palace to your house, and let golden apple trees and pear trees grow on the side of this bridge. Then will I give you my daughter."

When the old man heard that, he began to weep, and went home.

What said the snake? "Why weepest thou, father?"

The old man said, "I am weeping, darling, for the miseries which God sends me. The king wants a golden bridge from his palace to our house, and apple and pear trees on the side of this bridge."

The snake said, "Fear not, father, for I will do as the king said."

Then the snake thought and thought, and the golden bridge was made as the king had said. The snake did that in the nighttime. The king arose at midnight; he thought the sun was at meat (*i.e.* it was noon). He scolded the servants for not having called him in the morning.

The servants said, "King, it is night, not day"; and, seeing that, the king marveled.

In the morning the old man came. "Good-day, father-in- law."

"Thank you, father-in-law. Go, father-in-law, and bring your son, that we may hold the wedding."

He, when he went, said, "Hearken, what says the king? You are to go there for the king to see you."

What said the snake? "My father, if that be so, fetch the cart, and put in the horses, and I will get into it to go to the king."

No sooner said, no sooner done. He got into the cart and drove to the king. When the king saw him, he trembled with all his lords.

One lord older than the rest, said, "Fly not, O king, it were not well of you. For he did what you told him; and shall not you do what you promised? He will kill us all. Give him your daughter, and hold the marriage as you promised."

What said the king?" My old man, here is the maiden whom you demand. Take her to you."

And he gave him also a house by itself for her to live in with her husband. She, the bride, trembled at him.

The snake said, "Fear not, my wife, for I am no snake as you see me. Behold me as I am."

He turned a somersault, and became a golden youth, in armor clad; he had but to wish to get anything.

The maiden, when she saw that, took him in her arms and kissed him, and said, "Live, my king, many years. I thought you would eat me."

The king sent a man to see how it fares with his daughter. When the king's servant came, what does he see? The maiden fairer, lovelier than before.

He went back to the king. "O king, your daughter is safe and sound."

"As God wills with her," said the king.

Then he called many people and held the marriage; and they kept it up three days and three nights, and the marriage was consummated. And I came away and told the story.

- Source: Francis Hindes Groome *Gypsy Folk-Tales* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1899), no. 7, pp. 21-24.
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The Serpent

Italy

There was once upon a time a poor woman who would have given all she possessed for a child, but she hadn't one.

Now it happened one day that her husband went to the wood to collect brushwood, and when he had brought it home, he discovered a pretty little snake among the twigs.

When Sabatella, for that was the name of the peasant's wife, saw the little beast, she sighed deeply and said, "Even the snakes have their brood; I alone am unfortunate and have no children."

No sooner had she said these words than, to her intense surprise, the little snake looked up into her face and spoke: "Since you have no children, be a mother to me instead, and I promise you will never repent it, for I will love you as if I were your own son."

At first Sabatella was frightened to death at hearing a snake speak, but plucking up her courage, she replied, "If it weren't for any other reason than your kindly thought, I would agree to what you say, and I will love you and look after you like a mother."

So she gave the snake a little hole in the house for its bed, fed it with all the nicest food she could think of, and seemed as if she never could show it enough kindness.

Day by day it grew bigger and fatter, and at last one morning it said to Cola-Mattheo, the peasant, whom it always regarded as its father, "Dear papa, I am now of a suitable age and wish to marry."

"I'm quite agreeable," answered Mattheo, "and I'll do my best to find another snake like yourself and arrange a match between you."

"Why, if you do that," replied the snake, "we shall be no better than the vipers and reptiles, and that's not what I want at all. No; I'd much prefer to marry the king's daughter; therefore I pray you go without further delay, and demand an audience of the king, and tell him a snake wishes to marry his daughter."

Cola-Mattheo, who was rather a simpleton, went as he was desired to the king, and having obtained an audience, he said, "Your Majesty, I have often heard that people lose nothing by asking, so I have come to inform you that a snake wants to marry your daughter, and I'd be glad to know if you are willing to mate a dove with a serpent?"

The king, who saw at once that the man was a fool, said, in order to get quit of him, "Go home and tell your friend the snake that if he can turn this palace into ivory, inlaid with gold and silver, before tomorrow at noon, I will let him marry my daughter." And with a hearty laugh he dismissed the peasant.

When Cola-Mattheo brought this answer back to the snake, the little creature didn't seem the least put out, but said, "Tomorrow morning, before sunrise, you must go to the wood and gather a bunch of green herbs, and then rub the threshold of the palace with them, and you'll see what will happen."

Cola-Mattheo, who was, as I have said before, a great simpleton, made no reply; but before sunrise next morning he went to the wood and gathered a bunch of St. John's wort, and rosemary, and suchlike herbs, and rubbed them, as he had been told, on the floor of the palace. Hardly had he done so than the walls immediately turned into ivory, so richly inlaid with gold and silver that they dazzled the eyes of all beholders. The king, when he rose and saw the miracle that had been performed, was beside himself with amazement, and didn't know what in the world he was to do.

But when Cola-Mattheo came next day, and, in the name of the snake, demanded the hand of the princess, the king replied, "Don't be in such a hurry; if the snake really wants to marry my daughter, he must do some more things first, and one of these is to turn all the paths and walls of my garden into pure gold before noon tomorrow."

When the snake was told of this new condition, he replied, "Tomorrow morning, early, you must go and collect all the odds and ends of rubbish you can find in the streets, and then take them and throw them on the paths and walls of the garden, and you'll see then if we won't be more than a match for the old king."

So Cola-Mattheo rose at cock-crow, took a large basket under his arm, and carefully collected all the broken fragments of pots and pans, and jugs and lamps, and other trash of that sort. No sooner had he scattered them over the paths and walls of the king's garden than they became one blaze of glittering gold, so that everyone's eyes were dazzled with the brilliancy, and everyone's soul was filled with wonder.

The king, too, was amazed at the sight, but still he couldn't make up his mind to part with his daughter, so when Cola-Mattheo came to remind him of his promise he replied, "I have still a third demand to make. If the snake can turn all the trees and fruit of my garden into precious stones, then I promise him my daughter in marriage."

When the peasant informed the snake what the king had said, he replied, "Tomorrow morning, early, you must go to the market and buy all the fruit you see there, and then sow all the stones and seeds in the palace garden, and, if I'm not mistaken, the king will be satisfied with the result."

Cola-Mattheo rose at dawn, and taking a basket on his arm, he went to the market, and bought all the pomegranates, apricots, cherries, and other fruit he could find there, and sowed the seeds and stones in the palace garden. In one moment, the trees were all ablaze with rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and every other precious stone you can think of.

This time the king felt obliged to keep his promise, and calling his daughter to him, he said, "My dear Grannonia," for that was the princess's name, "more as a joke than anything else, I demanded what seemed to me impossibilities from your bridegroom, but now that he has done all I required, I am bound to stick to my part of the bargain. Be a good child, and as you love me, do not force me to break my word, but give yourself up with as good grace as you can to a most unhappy fate."

"Do with me what you like, my lord and father, for your will is my law," answered Grannonia.

When the king heard this, he told Cola-Mattheo to bring the snake to the palace, and said that he was prepared to receive the creature as his son-in-law.

The snake arrived at court in a carriage made of gold and drawn by six white elephants; but wherever it appeared on the way, the people fled in terror at the sight of the fearful reptile.

When the snake reached the palace, all the courtiers shook and trembled with fear down to the very scullion, and the king and queen were in such a state of nervous collapse that they hid themselves in a faraway turret. Grannonia alone kept her presence of mind, and although both her father and mother implored her to fly for her life, she wouldn't move a step, saying, "I'm certainly not going to fly from the man you have chosen for my husband."

As soon as the snake saw Grannonia, it wound its tail round her and kissed her. Then, leading her into a room, it shut the door, and throwing off its skin, it changed into a beautiful young man with golden locks, and flashing eyes, who embraced Grannonia tenderly, and said all sorts of pretty things to her. [In the original: "Embracing his bride he gathered the first fruits of his love."]

When the king saw the snake shut itself into a room with his daughter, he said to his wife, "Heaven be merciful to our child, for I fear it is all over with her now. This cursed snake has most likely swallowed her up."

Then they put their eyes to the keyhole to see what had happened. Their amazement knew no bounds when they saw a beautiful youth standing before their daughter, with the snake's skin lying on the floor beside him. In their excitement they burst open the door, and seizing the skin they threw it into the fire. [In the original: "The king ... looked through the keyhole to see what had happened. But when, instead of beholding what he expected, he saw a youth of such extraordinary charm, with the skin lying on the floor, he kicked down the door and entered the room with the queen. They went straight to the skin, picked it up, and threw it on the fire."]

But no sooner had they done this than the young man called out, "Oh, wretched people! what have you done?" and before they had time to look round he had changed himself into a dove, and dashing against the window he broke a pane of glass, and flew away from their sight.

But Grannonia, who in one and the same moment saw herself merry and sad, cheerful and despairing, rich and beggared, complained bitterly over this robbery of her happiness, this poisoning of her cup of joy, this unlucky stroke of fortune, and laid all the blame on her parents, though they assured her that they had meant no harm. But the princess refused to be comforted, and at night, when all the inhabitants of the palace were asleep, she stole out by a back door, disguised as a peasant woman, determined to seek for her lost happiness till she found it.

When she got to the outskirts of the town, led by the light of the moon, she met a fox, who offered to accompany her, an offer which Grannonia gladly accepted, saying "You are most heartily welcome, for I don't know my way at all about the neighborhood."

So they went on their way together, and came at last to a wood, where, being tired with walking, they paused to rest under the shade of a tree, where a spring of water sported with the tender grass, refreshing it with its crystal spray.

They laid themselves down on the green carpet and soon fell fast asleep, and did not waken again till the sun was high in the heavens. They rose up and stood for some time listening to the birds singing, because Grannonia delighted in their songs.

When the fox perceived this, he said: "If you only understood, as I do, what these little birds are saying, your pleasure would be even greater."

Provoked by his words -- for we all know that curiosity is as deeply inborn in every woman as even the love of talking -- Grannonia implored the fox to tell her what the birds had said.

At first the wily fox refused to tell her what he had gathered from the conversation of the birds, but at last he gave way to her entreaties, and told her that they had spoken of the misfortunes of a beautiful young prince, whom a wicked enchantress had turned into a snake for the period of seven years. At the end of this time he had fallen in love with a charming princess, but that when he had shut himself up into a room with her, and had thrown off his snake's skin, her parents had forced their way into the room and had burnt the skin, whereupon the prince, changed into the likeness of a dove, had broken a pane of glass in trying to fly out of the window, and had wounded himself so badly that the doctors despaired of his life.

Grannonia, when she learnt that they were talking of her lover, asked at once whose son he was, and if there was any hope of his recovery; to which the fox made answer that the birds had said he was the son of the king of Vallone Grosso, and that the only thing that could cure him was to rub the wounds on his head with the blood of the very birds who had told the tale.

Then Grannonia knelt down before the fox, and begged him in her sweetest way to catch the birds for her and procure their blood, promising at the same time to reward him richly.

"All right," said the fox, "only don't be in such a hurry; let's wait till night, when the little birds have gone to roost, then I'll climb up and catch them all for you."

So they passed the day, talking now of the beauty of the prince now of the father of the princess, and then of the misfortune that had happened. At last the night arrived, and all the little birds were asleep high up on the branches of a big tree. The fox climbed up stealthily and caught the little creatures with his paws one after the other; and when he had killed them all he put their blood into a little bottle which he wore at his side, and returned with it to Grannonia, who was beside herself with joy at the result of the fox's raid.

But the fox said, "My dear daughter, your joy is in vain, because, let me tell you, this blood is of no earthly use to you unless you add some of mine to it," and with these words he took to his heels.

Grannonia, who saw her hopes dashed to the ground in this cruel way, had recourse to flattery and cunning, weapons which have often stood the sex in good stead, and called out after the fox, "Father Fox, you would be quite right to save your skin, if, in the first place, I didn't feel I owed so much to you, and if, in the second, there weren't other foxes in the world; but as you know how grateful I feel to you, and as there are heaps of other foxes about, you can trust yourself to me. Don't behave like the cow that kicks the pail over after it has filled it with milk, but continue your journey with me, and when we get to the capital you can sell me to the king as a servant girl."

It never entered the fox's head that even foxes can be outwitted, so after a bit he consented to go with her; but he hadn't gone far before the cunning girl seized a stick, and gave him such a blow with it on the head, that he dropped down dead on the spot. Then Grannonia took some of his blood and poured it into her little bottle, and went on her way as fast as she could to Vallone Grosso.

When she arrived there she went straight to the royal palace, and let the king be told she had come to cure the young prince.

The king commanded her to be brought before him at once, and was much astonished when he saw that it was a girl who under took to do what all the cleverest doctors of his kingdom had failed in. As an attempt hurts no one, he willingly consented that she should do what she could.

"All I ask," said Grannonia, "is that, should I succeed in what you desire, you will give me your son in marriage."

The king, who had given up all hopes of his son's recovery, replied: "Only restore him to life and health and he shall be yours. It is only fair to give her a husband who gives me a son."

And so they went into the prince's room. The moment Grannonia had rubbed the blood on his wounds the illness left him, and he was as sound and well as ever. When the king saw his son thus marvelously restored to life and health, he turned to him and said : "My dear son, I thought of you as dead, and now, to my great joy and amazement, you are alive again. I promised this young woman that if she should cure you, to bestow your hand and heart on her, and seeing that heaven has been gracious, you must fulfil the promise I made her; for gratitude alone forces me to pay this debt."

But the prince answered: "My lord and father, I would that my will were as free as my love for you is great. But as I have plighted my word to another maiden, you will see yourself, and so will this young woman, that I cannot go back from my word, and be faithless to her whom I love."

When Grannonia heard these words, and saw how deeply rooted the prince's love for her was, she felt very happy, and blushing rosy red, she said: "But should I get the other lady to give up her rights, would you then consent to marry me?"

"Far be it from me," replied the prince, "to banish the beautiful picture of my love from my heart. Whatever she may say, my heart and desire will remain the same, and though I were to lose my life for it, I couldn't consent to this exchange."

Grannonia could keep silence no longer, and throwing off her peasant's disguise, she discovered herself to the prince, who was nearly beside himself with joy when he recognized his fair lady-love. He then told his father at once who she was, and what she had done and suffered for his sake.

Then they invited the king and queen of Starza-Longa to their court, and had a great wedding feast, and proved once more that there is no better seasoning for the joys of true love than a few pangs of grief.

- Source:
  1. Google Books: Andrew Lang *The Green Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1892), pp. 186-93.
  2. Internet Archive: Andrew Lang *The Green Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1892), pp. 186-93.
- Lang's source: Giambattista Basile, "Lo Serpe," Lo Cunto de li Cunti: Il Pentamerone, day 2, tale 5. Lang titles this story "The Enchanted Snake," and he does not credit Basile with its authorship.
- I have noted the more important diversions from the original text by citing N. M. Penzer's translation: *The Pentamerone of Biambattista Basile* (New York: Dutton, 1932).
- Link to another translation of this tale: "The Serpent," *Il Pentamerone; or, The Tale of Tales*, translated by Richard Burton, vol. 1 (London: Henry and Company, 1893), day 2, tale 5, pp. 170-80.
- This tale combines type 433B (marriage with a snake) with type 425 (search for the lost husband).
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The Water Snake

Russia, A. A. Erlenvein

There was once an old woman who had a daughter; and her daughter went down to the pond one day to bathe with the other girls. They all stripped off their shifts, and went into the water. Then there came a snake out of the water, and glided on to the daughter's shift. After a time the girls all came out, and began to put on their shifts, and the old woman's daughter wanted to put on hers, but there was the snake lying on it. She tried to drive him away, but there he stuck and would not move. Then the snake said, "If you'll marry me, I'll give you back your shift."

Now she wasn't at all inclined to marry him, but the other girls said, "As if it were possible for you to be married to him! Say you will!"

So she said, "Very well, I will." Then the snake glided off from the shift, and went straight into the water. The girl dressed and went home. And as soon as she got there, she said to her mother, "Mammie, mammie, thus and thus, a snake got upon my shift, and says he, 'Marry me or I won't let you have your shift;' and I said, 'I will.'"

"What nonsense are you talking, you little fool! as if one could marry a snake!" And so they remained just as they were, and forgot all about the matter.

A week passed by, and one day they saw ever so many snakes, a huge troop of them, wriggling up to their cottage. "Ah, mammie, save me, save me!" cried the girl, and her mother slammed the door and barred the entrance as quickly as possible. The snakes would have rushed in at the door, but the door was shut; they would have rushed into the passage, but the passage was closed. Then in a moment they rolled themselves into a ball, flung themselves at the window, smashed it to pieces, and glided in a body into the room. The girl got upon the stove, but they followed her, pulled her down, and bore her out of the room and out of doors. Her mother accompanied her, crying like anything.

They took the girl down to the pond, and dived right into the water with her. And there they turned into men and women. The mother remained for some time on the dike, wailed a little, and then went home.

Three years went by. The girl lived down there, and had two children, a son and a daughter. Now she often entreated her husband to let her go to see her mother. So at last one day he took her up to the surface of the water, and brought her ashore. But she asked him before leaving him, "What am I to call out when I want you?"

"Call out to me, 'Osip, [Joseph] Osip, come here!' and I will come," he replied.

Then he dived under water again, and she went to her mother's carrying her little girl on one arm, and leading her boy by the hand. Out came her mother to meet her. She was so delighted to see her!

"Good day, mother!" said the daughter.

"Have you been doing well while you were living down there?" asked her mother.

"Very well indeed, mother. My life there is better than yours here."

They sat down for a bit and chatted. Her mother got dinner ready for her, and she dined. "What's your husband's name?" asked her mother.

"Osip," she replied.

"And how are you to get home?"

"I shall go to the dike, and call out, 'Osip, Osip, come here!' and he'll come."

"Lie down, daughter, and rest a bit," said the mother.

So the daughter lay down and went to sleep. The mother immediately took an axe and sharpened it, and went down to the dike with it. And when she came to the dike, she began calling out, "Osip, Osip, come here!"

No sooner had Osip shown his head than the old woman lifted her axe and chopped it off. And the water in the pond became dark with blood.

The old woman went home. And when she got home her daughter awoke. "Ah! mother," says she, "I'm getting tired of being here; I'll go home."

"Do sleep here tonight, daughter; perhaps you won't have another chance of being with me."

So the daughter stayed and spent the night there. In the morning she got up and her mother got breakfast ready for her; she breakfasted, and then she said good-bye to her mother and went away, carrying her little girl in her arms, while her boy followed behind her. She came to the dike, and called out, "Osip, Osip, come here!"

She called and called, but he did not come. Then she looked into the water, and there she saw a head floating about. Then she guessed what had happened.

"Alas! my mother has killed him!" she cried.

There on the bank she wept and wailed. And then to her girl she cried, "Fly about as a wren, henceforth and evermore!"

And to her boy she cried, "Fly about as a nightingale, my boy, henceforth and evermore!"

"But I," she said, "will fly about as a cuckoo, crying 'Cuckoo!' henceforth and evermore!"

- Source: W. R. S. Ralston, *Russian Folk-Tales* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1873), pp. 116-18. Ralston's source: A. A. Erlenvein.
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Transformation into a Nightingale and a Cuckoo

Russia

A damsel fell in love with a snake, and was also beloved by him. He took her to wife. His dwelling was of pure glass, all crystal. This dwelling was situated underground, in a kind of mound, or something of the sort.

Well, it is said that her old mother at first grieved over her. How could she help doing so?

Well, when the time came, the snake's wife became the mother of twins, a boy and a girl. They looked, as they lay by their mother, as if they were made of wax. And she was herself as beautiful as a flower.

Well, God having given her children, she said, "Now, then, since they have been born as human beings, let us christen them among human beings."

She took her seat in a golden carriage, laid the children on her knees, and drove off to the village to the pope [orthodox priest]. The carriage had not got into the open country, when sadness was brought to the mother. The old woman had made an outcry in the whole village, seized a sickle, and rushed into the country.

She [the young mother] saw she had manifest death before her, when she called to her children, and went on to say, "Fly, my children, as birds about the world. You, my little son, as a nightingale, and you, my daughter, as a cuckoo."

Out flew a nightingale from the carriage by the right-hand, and a cuckoo by the left-hand window. What became of the carriage and horses and all, nobody knows. Nor did their mistress remain, only a dead nettle sprang up by the roadside.

- A. H. Wratislaw, *Sixty Folk-Tales from Exclusively Slavonic Sources* (London: Elliot Stock, 1889), no. 30, pp. 160-61.
- Wratislaw's source: P. Kulish.
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The Snake and the Princess

Russia

There was an emperor and empress who had three daughters. The emperor fell ill, and sent his eldest daughter for water.

She went to fetch it, when a snake said, "Come! Will you marry me?"

The princess replied, "No, I won't."

"Then," said he, "I won't give you any water."

Then the second daughter said, "I'll go. He'll give me some."

She went. The snake said to her, "Come! Will you marry me?"

"No," she said, "I won't." He gave her no water.

She returned and said, "He gave me no water. He said, 'If you will marry me I will give it.'"

The youngest said, "I will go. He will give me some."

She went, and the snake said to her, "Come! Will you marry me?"

"I will," she said. Then he drew her water from the very bottom, cold and fresh. She brought it home, gave it her father to drink, and her father recovered.

Then on Sunday a carriage came, and those with it said:

> Open the door,
> Princess!
> Why did the dear one love?
> Why draw water from the ford,
> Princess?

She was terrified, wept, and went and opened the door. Then they said again:

> Open the door,
> Princess!
> Why did the dear one love?
> Why draw water from the ford,
> Princess?

Then they came into the house and placed the snake in a plate on the table. There he lay, just as if he were of gold! They went out of the house, and said:

> Sit in the carriage,
> Princess!
> Why did the dear one love?
> Why draw water from the ford,
> Princess?

They drove off with her to the snake's abode. There they lived, and had a daughter born to them. They also took a godmother to live with them, but she was a wicked woman. The child soon died, and the mother died soon after it. The godmother went in the night to the place where she was buried, and cut off her hands. Then she came home, and heated water-gruel, scalded the hands, and took off the gold rings.

Then the princess -- such was the ordinance of God -- came to her for the hands, and said:

> The fowls are asleep, the geese are asleep,
> Only my godmother does not sleep.
> She scalds white hands in water-gruel,
> She takes off golden rings.

The godmother concealed herself under the stove. She said again:

> The fowls are asleep, the geese are asleep,
> Only my godmother does not sleep.
> She scalds white hands in water-gruel,
> She takes off golden rings.

The next day they came and found the godmother dead under the stove. They didn't give her proper burial, but threw her into a hole.

- A. H. Wratislaw, *Sixty Folk-Tales from Exclusively Slavonic Sources* (London: Elliot Stock, 1889), no. 29, pp. 159-60.
- Wratislaw's source: P. Kulish.
- Type 433C, with strong similarities to type 440.
- Link to additional tales of type 440, Frog Kings: Folktales about Slimy Suitors.
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The Girl and the Snake

Sweden

Once upon a time there was a girl who was supposed to go into the woods and bring home the cattle, but she could not find the herd. She got lost and came to a large mountain with gates and doors. She went inside. A table was standing there, set with all kinds of things to eat. There was also a bed there, and a large snake was lying on it.

It said to the girl, "Have a seat, if you want to. Come and lie down in this bed, if you want to! But if you don't want to, it's all right!"

The girl did not do any of this.

Finally the snake said, "People are coming now who want to dance with you, but don't go with them."

Soon afterward people did come, and they wanted to dance with the girl, but she would have nothing to do with them. Then they began to eat and drink. The girl left the mountain and went home again. The next day she went into the woods again to look for her herd, but she could not find what she was looking for. Instead, she got lost again and came to the same mountain. She went inside again and found everything the same as the first time: a set table and the bed with the snake.

It said to her, as the time before, "Have a seat, if you want to! Eat, if you want to! Come and lie down in this bed, if you want to! But if you don't want to, it's all right. Now a lot more people are coming who want to dance with you, but do not go with them."

The snake had barely finished talking when a lot more people came, and they began to dance and to eat and drink. The girl had nothing to do with them, but instead left the mountain and went home.

On the third day she went into the woods again, and the same thing happened to her as on the previous days. The snake invited her to eat and drink, which she did with a good appetite. After that the snake asked her to lie down next to it, and the girl did that as well.

Then the snake said, "Hold me in your arm!"

She did it.

"Kiss me!" said the snake. "If you are afraid, just put your apron between us!"

The girl did it, and in that instant the snake turned into a handsome young man. In reality he was a prince who had been bewitched into this form through magic, but the girl's courage had saved him. Of course, the two of them went away, and since then they have never been heard from again.

- Source: Translated from Klara Stroebe, "Das Mädchen und die Schlange," *Nordische Volksmärchen: Teil 1, Dänemark / Schweden* (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1915), pp. 215-16. First published in this German version, 1915.
- © 1998 by D. L. Ashliman.
- Link to another translation of this tale: The Girl and the Snake.
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The Snake and the Little Girl

Denmark (Bornholm)

There was once a little girl who was to bring food out to her father, who was plowing in the field. When she came to him with the food, he asked her to pick up his jacket, which he had put under a tree. The girl went to get it; but when she got there, she saw a terribly large snake lying on the jacket. She took a stick and wanted to chase it away, but the snake remained lying there. She begged it to go away so she could get the jacket for her father.

"Yes," said the snake, "you can get it, if you will come back to me and sit on my back."

The girl said yes to that, and then pushed the snake away from the jacket, then took it to her father. She came back immediately and sat down on the snake's back. It immediately ran off into the woods and kept running deeper into the woods.

When it had run a long time, it said: "Little girl, stand up on my back and see if you see anything!"

The girl stood up on its back and said: "I see something shining like clear silver."

"Yes, it is my mother's castle," said the snake. "We still have a long way to go."

The snake ran further into the woods, and then it said again: "Little girl, stand up on my back and see if you see anything!"

"Yes," said the girl, "I see something that shines like pure Gold."

"Yes, that is my father's castle," said the snake. "We still have a long way to go."

It went a long way further, and then said the third time: "Little girl, stand up on my back and see if you see anything!"

"Yes," said the girl, "now I see something that shines like a diamond."

"Yes, then we will be there right away," said the Snake.

It now ran until it came to a lovely castle. The snake lay down by the gate, and said to the girl: "Now stand up on my back and ring the bell! When the porter comes and asks what you want, then say that you want to enter into service at the castle, and he will probably welcome you."

The girl did as the snake said, and when the porter came and asked what she wanted, she said that she had come to seek work at the castle. He asked what she could do, and she replied that she could sweep the floor and carry water and help in the kitchen.

"Yes, she could gladly come in, for that is exactly what they needed," he said.

He followed her into the castle and showed her the room where she was to sleep. She then went down to the kitchen and helped with everything, and the people liked her because she was so helpful.

In the evening, when she was in her bedroom, she heard someone knocking on the door. She asked who it was.

"Well, it's me," said the snake. "It's cold out here, and I'm freezing. May I not come in and lie in your room?"

The girl thought it was a pity that it should lie out there and freeze, and so she let it in. But as soon as it had come in, it wanted to kiss her.

The girl held an apron between them, but it kissed her anyway. Immediately the most beautiful prince was standing there before her.

He thanked her for freeing him, and told her that he was a king's son, and that this was his own castle where they now were.

The prince and the girl now held their wedding with great joy. They then traveled first to his father and then to his mother, and from there to the little girl's parents, whom they brought to the castle, where they lived in joy and happiness.

- Source (books.google.com): Svend Grundtvig, "Slangen og den lille Pige," *Gamle danske Minder i Folkemunde: Folkeæventyr, Folkeviser, Folkesagn*, 3rd collection (Copenhagen: C. G. Iversens Forlagshandel, 1861), pp. 15-17.
- Source (Internet Archive): Svend Grundtvig, "Slangen og den lille Pige," *Gamle danske Minder i Folkemunde: Folkeæventyr, Folkeviser, Folkesagn*, 3rd collection (Copenhagen: C. G. Iversens Forlagshandel, 1861), pp. 15-17.
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King Lindorm

Denmark, Svend Grundtvig

Once upon a time there was a king who had a beautiful queen. On the first night of their marriage, nothing was written on their bed when they retired, but when they got up the next day, they read there that they would have no children. The king was very sad about this, and the queen even more so. She found it most unfortunate that there would be no heir for their kingdom.

One day, while deep in thought, she wandered to a remote spot. There she met an old woman who asked her why she was so sad. The queen looked up and said, "Oh, telling you will do no good. You can't help me."

"But perhaps I can," said the old woman, and asked the queen to tell her story. So the queen agreed, and told how on their wedding night a message had appeared on their bed that they would have no children. This was why she was so sad. The old woman told her that she could help her have children. That evening at sunset she should place a platter upside down in the northwest corner of the garden. The next morning at sunrise she should take it away. Beneath it she would find two roses, a red one and a white one. "Take the red one and eat it, and you shall have a boy; take the white one and it will be a girl. But do not eat them both," said the old woman.

The queen returned home and did what the old woman had told her to do. The next morning, just as the sun was coming up, she went to the garden and picked up the platter. There were two roses, a red one and a white one. Now she did not know which of the two she should take. If it were the red one, she would have a boy, and he might have to go to war and be killed, and then again she would have no child. So she decided to take the white one; then it would be a girl who would stay at home with her, and then get married and become queen in another kingdom. Thus she picked up the white rose and ate it. But it tasted so good that she picked up the red rose and ate it as well.

Now it so happened that at this time the king was away at war. When the queen noticed that she was pregnant she wrote to him to let him know, and he was very pleased. When the time for her delivery came, she gave birth to a lindorm. As soon as he was born, he crawled under the bed in the bedroom, and stayed there. Sometime later a letter arrived from the king announcing that he soon would return home. When his carriage pulled up in front of the castle and the queen came out to receive him, the lindorm came too and wanted to greet him. He jumped up into the carriage, calling out, "Welcome home, father!"

"What!," said the king. "Am I your father?"

"Yes, and if you will not be my father, I shall destroy you and the castle as well!"

The king had to agree. They went into the castle together, and the queen had to confess what had happened between her and the old woman. Some days later the council and all the important people in the kingdom assembled to welcome the king back home and to congratulate him on the victory over his enemies. The lindorm came as well and said, "Father, it is time for me to get married!"

"What are you thinking? Who would have you?" said the king.

"If you do not find a wife for me, be she young or old, large or small, rich or poor, then I shall destroy you and the entire castle as well."

So the king wrote to all the kingdoms, asking if someone would not marry his son. A beautiful princess responded, but it seemed strange to her that she was not allowed to see her future husband before entering the hall where the wedding was to take place. Only then did the lindorm make his appearance, taking his place beside her. The wedding day came to an end, and it was time for them to retire to the bedroom. They were scarcely inside, when he ate her alive.

Sometime later, the king's birthday arrived. They were all seated at the dinner table when the lindorm appeared and said, "Father, I want to get married!"

"What kind of a woman would have you?" asked the king.

"If you do not find a wife for me, whoever she may be, I shall eat you up, and the entire castle as well!"

So the king wrote to all the kingdoms, asking if someone would not marry his son. Once again a beautiful princess came from far away. She too was not allowed to see her groom until she was in the hall where they were to be married. The lindorm entered and took his place beside her. When the wedding day was over and they went into the bedroom, the lindorm killed her.

Sometime later, on the queen's birthday, they were all seated at the dinner table when the lindorm came in and said once again, "Father, I want to get married!"

"I cannot get you another wife," answered the king. "The two kings whose daughters I gave to you are now waging war against me. What am I to do?"

"Just let them come! As long as I am on your side, just let them come, and even if there were ten of them! But if you do not find a wife for me, be she young or old, large or small, rich or poor, then I shall destroy you and the castle as well!"

The king had to give in, but he was not happy about it. Now one of the king's shepherds, an old man who lived in a little house in the woods, had a daughter. The king went to him and said, "Listen, my dear man. Won't you give your daughter in marriage to my son?"

"No, I can't do that. I have only the one child to care for me when I am older, and further, if the prince can't take care of beautiful princesses he will not take care of my daughter, and that would be a sin." But the king insisted on having her and the old man had to give in.

The old shepherd went home and told his daughter everything. She became very sad and, deep in thought, took a walk in the woods. There she met an old woman who had gone into the woods to pick berries and wild apples. She was wearing a red skirt and a blue jacket. "Why are you so sad?" she asked.

"I have every reason to be sad, but there is no purpose in my telling you about it, because you can't help me."

"But perhaps I can," she said. "Just tell me!"

"Well, I am supposed to marry the king's son, but he is a lindorm and has already killed two princesses, and I know for sure that he will kill me as well."

"If you just listen to me, I can help you," said the old woman.

The girl was eager to hear her advice. "When you go to the bedroom following the ceremony, you must have ten nightshirts on. If you don't have that many, then you must borrow some. Ask for a bucketful of lye water, a bucketful of sweet milk, and an armful of switches. All these things must be taken to the bedroom. When he comes in, he will say, 'Beautiful maiden, take off your nightshirt!' Then you must say, 'King Lindorm, take off your skin!' You will say that to each other until you have taken off nine nightshirts and he has taken off nine skins. By then he will not have another skin, but you will still have on a nightshirt. Then you must take hold of him. He will be nothing more than a clump of bloody meat. Dip the switches into the lye water and beat him with them until he has almost fallen to pieces. Then you must bathe him in the sweet milk, wrap him in the nine nightshirts, and hold him on your arm. You will then fall asleep, but only for a short time."

The girl thanked her for the good advice, but she was still afraid, for this was indeed a dangerous undertaking with such a sinister animal.

The wedding day arrived. A large and splendid carriage brought two ladies who prepared the girl for the wedding. Then she was taken to the castle and led into the hall. The lindorm appeared, took his place next to her, and they were married. When evening arrived, and it was time for them to go to bed, the bride asked for a bucketful of lye water, a bucketful of sweet milk, and an armful of switches. The men all laughed at her, saying that it was some kind of a peasant superstition and all in her imagination. But the king said that she should have what she asked for, and they brought it to her. Before going into the bedroom, she put nine nightshirts over the one she was already wearing.

When they both were in the bedroom the lindorm said, "Beautiful maiden, take off your nightshirt!"

She answered, "King Lindorm, take off your skin!"

And thus it continued until she had taken off nine nightshirts and he had taken off nine skins. She found new courage, for he was now lying there and the floor with blood flowing freely from him and barely able to move. Then she took the switches, dipped them into the lye water, and beat him as hard as she could until there was scarcely a twig left among the sticks. Then she dipped him into the sweet milk and laid him on her arm. She fell asleep, for it was late, and when she awoke, she was lying in the arms of a handsome prince.

Morning came, and no one dared to look into the bedroom, because they all believed that the same thing had happened to her as to the two others. Finally the king wanted to look, and as he opened the door she called out, "Do come in! Everything is all right!" He went in and was filled with joy. He fetched the queen and the others, and there was a great celebration about the bridal bed unlike any that had ever been seen before. The bridal couple got up and went into another room where they got dressed, because the bedroom was in a horrible mess. Then the wedding was celebrated anew with pomp and joy. The king and queen liked the young queen very much. They could not treat her too well, for she had redeemed their lindorm.

Sometime later she became pregnant. There was another war, and the old king and King Lindorm had gone to the battlefield. Her time arrived, and she gave birth to two beautiful boys. At this time the Red Knight was at court. They asked him to take the king a letter announcing the birth of the two beautiful boys. He rode away a short distance and opened the letter, then changed it to read that she had given birth to two young dogs. The king received the letter and was very sad. He found it unbelievable that she had given birth to young dogs, although it would have not surprised him if it had been a lindorm or something like that. He wrote back that the creatures should be allowed to live until he returned home, that is if they could be kept alive at all. The Red Knight was to deliver this letter, but a short distance away he opened it as well and wrote that the queen and her children were to be burned alive.

The old queen was greatly saddened by this letter, for she liked the young queen very much. Soon thereafter another letter arrived, announcing the king's return home. The queen became frightened and did not know what to do. She could not bring herself to have them burned. She sent the two children to live with a wet nurse, for she hoped that the king might change his mind once he was back home. She gave the young queen some money and food and sent her into the forest.

She wandered about in the woods for two days and was in great need. She came to a high mountain, which she climbed without stopping. At the top there were three benches. She sat down on the middle one and squeezed the milk from her breasts, for she was in great distress, not having her children with her. Then two large birds, a swan and a crane, flew down and sat on either side of her, and she pressed her milk into their beaks. They were that close to her. And even as they sat there, they turned into the two most handsome princes that one can imagine, and the mountain turned into the most beautiful royal castle, with servants and animals and gold and silver and everything that there should be. They had been enchanted, and the spell would never have been broken if they had not drunk the milk from a queen who had just given birth to two boys. She went with them, with King Swan and King Crane. Each one wanted to marry her, for she had redeemed them both.

Meanwhile King Lindorm arrived home and asked about the queen. "Indeed!" Said the old queen. "You should be asking about her! Who do you think that you are! You paid no attention to the fact that she redeemed you from your curse. You just went ahead and wrote to me that she and the children should be burned alive. For shame!"

"No!" answered King Lindorm. "You wrote to me that she had given birth to two young dogs. And I wrote back that you should let the creatures live until I returned home."

They talked back and forth for a long time and finally realized that the Red Knight had been behind the treachery. He was captured, and he had to confess. They locked him in a barrel studded with nails, hitched it to four horses, and they ran with him over mountains and valleys.

The king was full of despair about his wife and children, when he discovered that they were two beautiful boys. The old queen said to him, "Don't worry, the boys are well cared for. They are staying with wet nurses, but I do not know how she is faring. I gave her some food and money and sent her into the woods, but since then we have heard nothing from her."

The king ordered that the children be brought back. Then he took some food and some money and went into the woods to look for her. He wandered about for two, then three days looking for her, but he could not find her. Finally he came to the castle in the woods. He asked if the people there had not seen a strange maiden in the woods, but they had not seen anyone. Then he wanted to enter the castle to see what kind of royalty lived there. He went inside. Just as he entered he saw her, but she was afraid, for she thought that he had come to burn her alive, and she ran away.

The two princes came in. They talked together and became good friends. They invited him to stay for dinner. He mentioned the beautiful maiden and asked where she was from. They answered that she was a lovely person and that she had been enchanted. He wanted to know what she had freed them from, and they told him the entire story. Then he said that he liked her very much and asked them if they could not come to an agreement concerning her. He proposed that her dinner should be over salted, and that the person she would ask to drink to her health should receive her. The princes agreed to this arrangement, for this would enable them to determine which of the two of them would have her, for they did not believe that she would ask a stranger to drink to her health.

They went to dinner, and she said:

> The food is too salty for me,
> King Swan sits next to me,
> King Crane is good to me,
> King Lindorm drinks with me.

He picked up the silver tankard and drank to her health. The others drank to their own health, but then they had to drink to her health as well, even though they were not satisfied with the outcome. Then King Lindorm told how she had redeemed him before she had redeemed them. Therefore he was the closest one to her. After hearing this, the two princes stated that if he had told them this in the first place, they would have given her to him. But he said that he could not have known that for sure.

Then King Lindorm returned home with the queen. Meanwhile the children had also been taken back home. King Swan kept the castle in the woods and married a princess from another kingdom. And King Crane went to a different country where he got married. Thus each one of them had something. King Lindorm and his queen stood in high honor as long as they lived. They were very happy and had many children.

When I was there the last time, they offered me a tin sandwich in a sieve.

- Source: Klara Stroebe, "König Lindwurm," *Nordische Volksmärchen: Teil 1, Dänemark / Schweden* (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1915), pp. 3-11. First published in this German translation, 1915.
- Stroebe's source: Svend Grundtvig, "Kong Lindorm," *Gamle danske Minder i Folkemunde* (Copenhagen: C. G. Eversens Forlag, 1854), no. 216, pp. 172-80.
- Grundtvig's source: Maren Mathisdatter, 67 years of age.
- English translation © 1998 by D. L. Ashliman.
- A lindorm (also spelled lindworm) was a mythological beast much feared in ancient northern Europe. It is depicted variously as a giant snake or a wingless dragon. The name derives from an Old Norse word for "serpent."
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The Silk Spinster

Germany, A. Kuhn and W. Schwartz

Once upon a time there was a peasant. He worked in the woods and took his oldest daughter along to help him. When the day grew hot he took off his jacket and laid it in the grass. When his work was finished, he asked his daughter to fetch it for him. She went to it, but there was a worm lying on it. She did not want to pick it up, so she ran back to her father and asked him what she should do. He told her not to be afraid of the worm. She should just throw it aside and bring him his jacket. She did this, and they went home.

The next day the peasant again went to work in the woods, taking his second daughter along. Everything happened as before, and in the end she threw the worm aside, and she and her father returned home together.

On the third day, the first daughter was to go along again, but the third daughter asked the father to take her. She wanted to help out like the others. They laughed at her, and asked her just how she would be able to help. They had a low opinion of her and kept her at home like a Cinderella. But she begged her father so earnestly, that he finally said she might come along. When it was time to go home, her father told her to fetch his jacket. She went to it and found the worm on it. But she said to it, "Dear little worm, would you like a soft place to lie?"

The worm looked at her with bright and friendly eyes, as though it wanted to say "yes!" Therefore she gathered together some moss and made him a nice soft nest. As soon as she laid him in it, the worm began to speak, and asked her, "Would you like to enter my service? All you have to do is carry me about a few hours each day. For this you will receive a good wage and food and drink as well. If you do this for three years, I will be redeemed, because I am an enchanted prince, and then I will marry you!"

The girl said that she would do it, and the worm said, "Then come here tomorrow at the same time."

After that she went home with her father. Then she said, "I have lived at home long enough. I am going try my luck out in the world."

They all laughed at her, saying, "You, Cinderella, who would have any use for you?"

The girl replied, "I already have a position," and asked her father to allow her to leave. He did not want to give his permission, because even if she did not understand very much, she was still a good worker. Finally he gave in to her begging, and the next day she set forth.

She went into the woods and soon found the worm. He was very pleased that she had come, and he told her that she should now carry him around a little. That she did, and when the time was up, a splendid castle suddenly appeared. In the castle there was a great hall with a large table all decked out with food and drink, more beautiful than anything she had ever seen in her entire lifetime. She ate and drank her fill, and then went to bed. Every day she carried the worm about for an hour or two and then went to the castle, where everything was prepared for her, and where she was splendidly provided for.

After a year had passed she asked the worm for permission to visit her father. He agreed on the condition that she return promptly. She took gold and other precious things for her father and her sisters and went home. When she arrived with her treasures, her sisters wanted to know where she had gotten it all, and who her master was. But she told them nothing, for the worm had forbidden her to do so. They beat her and scolded her, but she said nothing.

The next day she went back into the woods to the worm, and again carried it about for an hour or two each day. At the end of the second year she once again visited her father and her sisters, and also at the end of the third year. When she left the worm, he ordered her also this last time to return promptly, and she promised to do so.

Her father and her sisters insisted that she tell them who her master was and where she worked, and they refused to let her go. Finally she tore herself away with force. When she returned to the woods, it was too late. The worm was no longer there. Sadly she looked everywhere, but that castle had disappeared, and the worm as well, for while she was away, his spell had lapsed, and he had turned back into a king, and he was now back at home in his own kingdom.

The girl decided to search for him throughout the world. On her way she came to a hut in the forest where an old woman lived, whom she asked for shelter for the night. The old woman received her in a friendly manner, and the next morning when she was about the leave, she gave her three apples. She told her there was a golden spindle in the first one, a golden yarn reel in the second one, and a golden spinning wheel in the third one, and told her whom she would meet and what she should do. The girl kindly thanked the friendly old woman and set forth.

Many days later and after she had walked a great distance, she came to a glass mountain. She did not know how she could cross over it, because it was so smooth that she always slid back down. Finally she saw a smithy not far away. She went there and had horseshoes attached to her hands and knees, and climbed over the mountain.

She came to a great city. This was where the king lived who had been the worm that she had carried about every day. He was already married. He had a beautiful wife and had long since forgotten the girl.

She disguised herself and went to the castle where she hired herself out as a silk spinster. On the first day she opened the first apple that the old woman in the woods had given her. She took out the golden spindle. When the queen saw it, she liked it very much and wanted to buy it from the girl. "No," she said. "It is not for sale, but I will give it to you if you will let me sleep with the king one night."

"Why not?," thought the queen, and gave her promise. As evening approached she gave the king a sleeping potion, and when he was fast asleep, she sent for the silk spinster and led her into the king's bedroom.

She sat next to his bed and cried bitterly, "Now I know that thanklessness is the way of the world," she said. "Three years I carried you about as a worm. For your sake I received blows and harsh words from my father and sisters. I had horseshoes attached to my hands and knees in order to climb over the glass mountain. Now you have forgotten everything and taken another wife." But the king was so fast asleep that he did not understand a thing. At dawn the queen came and led the silk spinster out again.

Sadly she took the second apple, broke it open, and took out the golden yarn reel. When the queen saw it, she admired it greatly and asked the girl to sell it to her. Once again she said that it was not for sale, but it could be earned if she were allowed to sleep with the king for another night. The queen gave her promise, and everything happened as during the first night. The king lay in knee-deep sleep, and no amount of crying and complaining could awaken him. However one of the king's servants had seen the queen bring the spinster into the king's bedroom. He was curious, and listened to everything that the silk spinster said. The next day he told the king what he had seen and heard.

But that morning the queen had once again led the silk spinster out of the king's bedroom. In desperation, the girl opened her last apple, the one with the golden spinning wheel. When the queen saw it, she said she would let her sleep with the king yet another night, if she would give her the golden spinning wheel. The girl agreed, and that evening the queen once again gave her husband a sleeping potion, but he only pretended to drink it. He secretly poured it out, then lay down and pretended to be asleep. Then the queen fetched the silk spinster and led her into the king's bedroom. The girl sat sadly next to the king's bed and cried bitterly, "Now I know that thanklessness is the way of the world," she said. "Three years I carried you about as a worm. For your sake I received blows and harsh words from my father and sisters. I had horseshoes attached to my hands and knees in order to climb over the glass mountain. And you have forgotten everything and taken another wife."

The king listened silently to every word, but pretended to be asleep. The next day he ordered a large festive meal, and he invited the silk spinster to take her place at his right side. When everyone was seated, he said, "I want to present all of you with a question, and ask for your honest and open answer. Many years ago I lost the key to my chest, and therefore had a new one made. But now I have found the old one. Which one should I use from now on?"

"The old one," they all said as with one voice. "The old one always fits better."

"Now," said the king, "the silk spinster who is sitting here at my right side took care of me for three years while I was an enchanted worm. She suffered greatly on my behalf. Therefore, I would like to leave my wife for as long as the first one is alive, and marry her." And that is what he did. And thus the silk spinster became queen.

- Source: A. Kuhn and W. Schwartz, "Die Seidenspinnerin," *Norddeutsche Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1848), pp. 347-52.
- Translation © 1998 by D. L. Ashliman.
- Types 433C and 425.
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The Snake

Germany, Ignaz and Joseph Zingerle

In olden times, when the castle was still standing on the hill over there, a count lived there with his wife. They had possessions in abundance, and they would have been the happiest couple, if they had a child and domestic peace.

From the earliest morning until late in the evening the count and the countess quarreled and squabbled, and he never called his wife anything but a slimy snake.

Thus it continued for many long years, and the count became worse than ever, until his wife unexpectedly became pregnant. Then the cruel lord turned more friendly and rejoiced in his future heir. This continued for several weeks, and everyone thought that peace had come to the castle forever, but then it turned worse than ever, for when the countess's time came, she gave birth to a snake.

When the count saw his sweet hopes thus shattered he became angrier than ever. He ranted and raged like a wild animal, accused his wife of being a wicked witch in league with the devil, and wanted to kill the snake without further ado. The countess pled so long and fervently that her child be allowed to live at least long enough to see what would become of it, that he finally relented, and did not kill the snake. But he remained angry from then on, and finally went his own way, paying no more heed to his wife or his snake.

The countess, on the other hand, loved the snake as much as if it had been the most beautiful boy and stood next to its cradle day and night. The worm grew and grew, and the countess loved it more and more, caring for it like her own child. Thus it continued for twenty years, and the snake had not yet left its room.

After turning twenty years of age, and with the countess seated next to it in its room, the snake one evening suddenly opened its mouth and began to speak. "My dear mother," it said, "I am now twenty years old and would like to get married. I therefore ask you to find me a bride."

The countess was very surprised to hear her child speak, and even more so to hear what it had said. She promised to fulfill its wish and began seeking a bride for her snake. But that was a difficult match, for even the most marriage-crazy girls wanted nothing to do with such an arrangement.

The snake repeated its wish every day, and the countess looked ever more frantically for a bride for her child, but she could not find one.

Finally she thought of the hen girl, who was a sweet and obedient child. The countess thought she certainly would accept the proposal and consider it a stroke of good luck to thus become a countess. But the mother calculated badly, because the hen girl wanted nothing at all to do with the proposal when it was presented to her. The girl thought that if she behaved well she would get along in the world, and that she could never love a snake. She would rather remain a poor hen girl and eat black bread than to lead the richest life at the side of such an uncanny animal.

Upon hearing this the countess grew angry with the poor girl and said, "If you reject your good fortune, I'll find someone else."

But that was not to be, for the countess came away with a long face from every place that she sought a bride for her child.

Recognizing the situation she returned to the dear, pious hen girl and addressed her with sweet and kind words. "Please don't stupidly stand in the way of your own happiness," she said. "If you marry my child you will become countess and will be taken care of as long as you live. What opportunities will you have if you remain as you are now? You will have to feed the hens and will remain a lowly servant. But if you follow my advice, honor and wealth will smile upon you."

Thus argued the countess until the poor girl felt like she had a mill wheel turning back and forth in her head, and she did not know what she should do. Seeing the girl's indecision, the countess pressed still harder, until finally the girl -- in order to free herself from the noblewoman -- asked for three days' time to think about it. The countess was satisfied with this and left the child alone.

However, she returned the very next day and asked the child for her decision. She did the same thing the second day. The child did not know how to help herself and thought, "If heaven does not advise me, I do not know what to do. If I do not marry the snake, I'll never have any peace, for this woman is so persistent, but I do not want to marry it."

Burdened with these doubts the girl went out into the castle passageway where there stood in the corner a beautiful statue of the Mother of God. The pious girl had a special devotion to this statue and had often found solace there on other occasions. Therefore every time she passed it she said an Ave Maria and always felt better and stronger. This time she knelt down before the Mother of God and prayed most fervently for advice as to what she should do in this case.

After praying for a long time, the girl thought that the Mother of God should either nod a yes or shake a no, when the miraculous statue suddenly began to speak, saying, "Your prayer has been heard. Marry the countess's child, for you have been chosen to redeem it. It is a snake because of the sinful life of its parents, but you can give it a human form. So listen to me! On your wedding night when you and the snake are alone in the bridal chamber it will say to you, 'Get undressed!' Then you must answer, 'You get undressed first,' and the snake will take off a skin. Then it will say again, 'Get undressed,' and you must again answer him, 'You get undressed first.' Then the snake will take off another skin. This must happen seven times, and when you say for the seventh time, 'You get undressed first,' the snake will take off its seventh skin, and the count's son will be redeemed and will stand before you as a handsome youth."

Thus spoke the statue, and then remained silent.

The distressed girl was now much relieved, and she felt at peace with herself. Thanking heaven for helping her, she went to the countess and told her that she wanted to marry the snake. The countess was overjoyed. She called the hen girl her daughter and hugged her. Then she went to her child and introduced his bride to him.

Fearing that the girl might change her mind, the countess wanted to see the couple married that very day. Thus she gave the bride jewelry and clothing and told her to dress herself festively. As soon as the girl came back into the room -- now washed, dressed, and bejeweled -- the countess sent for the chaplain, who married the couple. The countess was very happy and wished the bridal couple good luck. The snake too was in good spirits, caressing the bride in a manner that made one wonder.

In the meanwhile evening came, and the stars appeared in the sky. The countess took leave of her children and left them alone.

As soon as the snake saw that it was alone in the room with its bride it said, "Get undressed."

The bride replied, "You get undressed first."

The snake seemed to be happy with this answer and immediately peeled off a skin. Then it said again, "Get undressed."

The bride replied, "You get undressed first," and the snake pulled off another skin.

Then it said again, "Get undressed."

Once again the bride answered as she had the first two times. And thus it continued seven times, and when the bride said for the seventh time, "You get undressed first," the snake pulled off its seventh and last skin, and behold, instead of a snake, there stood before her a marvelously handsome youth, better looking than any knight she had ever seen.

He rushed toward her, embraced her and caressed her and called her his dearly beloved bride and his redeemer. Then they climbed into the high bridal bed and slept blissfully until morning dawned and people began scurrying about the courtyard.

After daybreak when the handsome couple came out of the bedroom, the countess was already standing at their door, for she was very curious how their wedding night had progressed. To her great surprise she saw the most handsome man there instead of an ugly snake. At first she could almost not believe her eyes. But when the handsome knight called her mother and kissed her hand she recognized that he was indeed her transformed son, and her joy knew no bounds.

The wedding was now celebrated with jubilation and joy like in the next life. But their happiness did not last forever. When the old countess looked at her son and saw how handsome he was, it seemed to her that he was too good for the hen girl, and she was envious of her daughter-in-law for her husband. She became ever more out of sorts and jealous, and she tried to talk her son into rejecting his wife. The young count, however, loved his wife tenderly. He did not listen to his mother's advice and remained true to his wife.

When his mother again reproached him and tried to convince him to reject his wife, he said, "I have my wife to thank for my redemption. Therefore I will always be thankful and true to her."

After hearing this the countess recognized that her attempts were in vain, and she put a good face on her evil game. And the young couple lived happily for a long, long time.

(Orally from Absam

- Source: Ignaz and Joseph Zingerle, "Die Schlange," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen aus Süddeutschland* (Regensburg: Papier, Druck und Verlag von Friedrich Pustet, 1854), pp. 173-79.
- Translation © 1998 by D. L. Ashliman.
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The Serpent

Germany, Ignaz and Joseph Zingerle

Once upon a time there was a hunter who had a wife and many children, but only a meager existence. He had many difficulties with his work. He would have gladly done all the men's work both at home and away from home, but he was not able to, so although he had only a small income, he still had to hire a helper.

He had about the same luck at hunting that others have. Today he got something, tomorrow nothing, and many an evening he came home with an empty bag after spending the whole day traipsing himself tired.

Not far from his house there was a high mountain. This was his favorite place to hunt, and he went there often, for this was the easiest place to spot game. One day while hunting on this mountain he saw a human lying in the footpath. His dog ran ahead then raced around the person who was lying there, all the time barking loudly. The dog was so wild that it seemed he wanted to tear the person to pieces. With difficulty the hunter held him back. It was strange that the dog was attacking this person with such fury, because normally he would do no harm to anyone.

With the dog barking at him, the person lying there raised himself a little and said to the hunter, "Be so good as to sell this dog to me."

"No," said the hunter, "I need this dog myself and cannot give him to you. But I have another one at home that you can have, if what you want is a dog."

"That's good," said the man lying there. "Let my buy the other one. But you must bring it here at exactly this time tomorrow, and we will close the deal. Did you hear? Exactly at this time."

The hunter gave his word, went away with his dog, and hunted awhile longer on the mountain. Finding no game, he gave up his traipsing about and made his way toward home. He arrived home, and after greeting his wife he told her that he had sold the dog that he never took hunting.

The wife was glad to hear this and said, "You should have sold the other one as well. We would be better off giving the bread to our children that we use feeding the dogs."

The next day, as the appointed time approached, the hunter said, "I have to leave now with the dog, for the man might not wait, and then the deal would be broken."

He lured the promised dog to come to him and was about to leave when his thirteen-year-old daughter came up to him and cried out, "Oh, father, let me come along too!"

"Why do want to go with me today?" asked the hunter.

The girl did not have an answer, but still would not cease asking to be allowed to go with her father. In the meantime the hunter's wife came by and took the girl's side, so in the end the father gave in and allowed her to go.

They went to the mountain, coming finally to the path where the person had been lying the day before. But today a wild serpent was lying there. The frightened hunter immediately realized that there had been something uncanny about the person whom the dog had barked at the day before. Taking his daughter by the hand, he said, "Let's go. We have to turn back. Yesterday I knew there was something not right about that man, and now today there is a serpent lying there in his place."

The girl too was afraid, took his hand, and wanted to go. Then the dragon moved, shot toward the girl, wrapped his tail around her, and disappeared into the mountain with her. The hunter, paralyzed with fear, stared after the monster.

Now he was sorry that he had not brought his rifle. If he had been armed he at least could have peppered the dragon's skin a bit. However, staring after them did no good, and finally he had to decide to go home and report the sad news. Upon his arrival, his wife saw his distorted face and said immediately, "Where did you leave the girl? Why isn't she with you?"

Tears came to the hunter's eyes and, crying, he told her what had happened. After hearing this the hunter's wife was horrified and ran about crying, "We did not bless the child enough, otherwise this evil would not have happened to her."

The next day the hunter returned to the mountain and combed back and forth and up and down hoping to find some trace of his child. But he did not find as much as a scrap of her clothing, and that evening he had to return home empty-handed. Undaunted, he returned often, looking in every corner and hole. His thoughts were always with his daughter, even while hunting game. But his searching was all in vain, and seven years passed without his discovering even the slightest trace of the girl.

After the seven years had passed it happened one day that the hunter and his helper went to the mountain to hunt. They saw a beautiful game animal and began to track it, thinking it would soon be theirs. However, the animal stayed just fa enough ahead of them so they could not get a shot at it, although they never lost it completely from their eyes. They were determined to get the animal, whatever it might do. Thus they pursued it long and hard, but all for naught, and did not notice that it was getting dark. They did not stop until night had fallen, and finally the hunter said to his helper, "It is late. Night has come, and we are not going to make it back home."

"I don't care," said the helper. "It isn't cold, and we can sleep here on the ground just as well as at home in bed."

"No, said the hunter, "I am not going to lie on the ground here. It is exactly seven years since the serpent carried my daughter away, and if we were to lie down on the ground here it could also happen to us that a serpent or some other beast might attack us and tear us to pieces."

"Wait a bit," answered the helper. "I'll climb a tree and look around to see if there is a house nearby."

The hunter laughed at him, saying, "Yes indeed, a house nearby! I know this entire mountain from top to bottom and know for certain that there is no house nearby."

But the helper would not be dissuaded, and he climbed the tree and looked around. "Look!" he suddenly called out. "I can see a light just a little above us. There is certainly a house up there where we can spend the night."

The hunter did not know what to think of this, because he knew full well that no one lived around here far and wide. The helper climbed quickly down the tree and said, "Let's go up to the light and see if there are people there who will giv us shelter."

The hunter had no desire to go along, but the helper would not give in, and ridiculed him, so he finally agreed to go, and the two of them climbed up the mountain. They had not gone far when a light glistened brightly through the tree branches, and the hunter saw that the helper had been right. But he was all the more fearful, for he knew that there never had been a house around here. His fear became even greater when, after advancing a few paces, there appeared befor them a magnificent castle, from which the light was beaming.

The helper stopped and said, "Now you can see which of us was right. I knew right away that if there was a light on the mountain there must be a house there as well. Let's go in and ask the people for shelter."

The hunter cautioned him, saying, "I have been at this spot many times, but never in my lifetime has there been a castle standing here. Believe you me, there is something not right about this. We would be better off to turn back and spend the night in a tree."

But the helper would not be dissuaded, and he said that he would go inside, come what may.

"Then I'll have to go too," thought the hunter to himself, and climbed up to the door with his helper. They went inside, with the helper bravely leading the way and the hunter timidly following.

A most beautiful maiden came up to them and asked them what they wanted.

The servant spoke first, saying, "Nightfall caught us in the woods and we were not able to make our way home. May we ask you for shelter for the night?"

"Oh, yes," replied the maiden. "You can spend the night here, but I have to tell you one thing: You must show neither fear nor disgust."

"If there is nothing more than that," said the helper, "then we can well spend the night here, for we never show fear nor disgust."

The helper was speaking for himself, for the hunter thought something quite different, but he kept his mouth shut and surrendered himself to fate.

The maiden led the two up to a room. Inviting them to be seated, she went into the kitchen and brought them something to eat. They ate heartily and felt no disgust.

While they were eating, the maiden fetched a tub and placed it in the room. Then she went for water, and carried water inside until the tub was full. The two did not know why she was doing this, and the hunter was still secretly afraid.

Then suddenly a disgusting serpent came in the door and fell into the tub, splashing the water high. The hunter was now even more frightened, because as far as he could determine, this was the same serpent that seven years earlier had abducted his daughter.

The maiden then went to the tub and began vigorously to wash the serpent. The longer she washed, the redder the water became, until finally it was so red that there appeared to be nothing but blood in the container. The two at the table had to take hold of themselves to keep their hearts from fluttering like a lamb's tail.

After the maiden had washed the serpent clean she helped him out of the tub. Then he began to speak, saying, "Maiden, would you not like to marry me?"

"No," she said, "I cannot do that. You are a serpent and I am a human."

He asked her again, "Maiden, won't you marry me?"

She said again, "No, I cannot do that. You are a serpent and I am a human."

Then he asked for the third time, "Maiden, are you sure that you won't marry me?"

She could no longer refuse him. She felt sorry for him and said, "Because you won't give in, I will accept you. I have been washing you for seven years, so for a while I will continue to be able to wash you."

She had hardly said this when the serpent disappeared, and a wonderfully handsome youth stood there in its place. As her bridegroom he extended his hand to her and said, "You have now redeemed me. As thanks for this I will indeed take you as my wife and secure a happy life for you. In this castle we have possessions enough, and the castle itself will no longer be enchanted, as it was until now."

The he led the maiden to the hunter and asked him, "Do you know her?"

"Why should I know her?" said the hunter.

"Look at her carefully," said the youth, and tell me if this is not your daughter. I was banished seven years before she was born. Then I had to wait thirteen years before bringing her to my castle. For seven years she has had to wash me every day. Now the magic has been broken, and I will take her to be my wife. The rest of you no longer must suffer from poverty. My wealth would be sufficient to care for you even if you had more children than you actually have."

The hunter did not know what was happening to him as he heard this. He looked first at the maiden and then at the youth, and could not fully believe that the woman was his child and the man his future son-in-law. But if he could trust in his own eyes then he had to believe that this was really his daughter standing before him, and he did not know why he should not believe the youth. Beside himself with joy, he jumped up and embraced them both, and then for a long time expressed thanks that everything had concluded so well.

The next day they all went together to the hunter's house and introduced themselves to the hunter's wife, telling her the whole story. It cannot be stated how happy she was, and she hurriedly began preparations for the wedding. When everything was ready the wedding was celebrated with great splendor. From this time forth the hunter's family had the best possible life with the daughter's husband. And they all lived happily together until the end of their lives.

(Heard in Meran

- Source: Ignaz und Joseph Zingerle, "Der Wurm," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen aus Süddeutschland* (Regensburg: Papier, Druck und Verlag von Friedrich Pustet, 1854), pp. 311-19.
- The German title of this story is "Der Wurm." The German word *Wurm* (like its English cognate *worm*) can signify either small earthworm-type creatures, or much larger dragon-like serpents.
- Translation © 1998 by D. L. Ashliman.
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Oda and the Snake

Germany

Once upon a time there was a man who had three daughters. The youngest one was named Oda.

One day the father wanted to go the market, and he asked his daughters what he should bring back to them. The oldest asked for a golden spinning wheel, the second for a golden ring, but Oda said, "Bring me that which runs away from beneath your carriage when you are about to return."

At the market the father bought what the older girls had wished for themselves, then set off toward home, and behold, a snake ran from beneath his carriage. The man caught it and brought it along for Oda. He threw it into the bottom of hi carriage, then afterward in front of the house door, and left it lying there.

When Oda entered the door the snake began speaking, "Oda! Dear Oda! Can't I come inside?"

"What?" said Oda. "My father brought you up to the front door, and now you want to come inside?" But she gave in.

Then Oda went to her bedroom, and the snake called after her, "Oda, dear Oda! Can't I rest in front of your bedroom door?"

"Look here," said Oda. "My father brought you up to the front door, and I let you come inside, and now you want to lie in front of my bedroom door? Well, let it be so."

When Oda was about to enter her bedroom and opened the bedroom door, the snake called out again, "Oh, Oda, dear Oda! Can't I come into your bedroom?"

"What," called Oda, "Didn't my father bring you up to the font door? Didn't I let you come inside and up to my bedroom door? And now you want to come into my bedroom with me? -- All right, if you will now be satisfied, come inside, but you must lie here quietly, I'm telling you!"

With that Oda let the snake come inside, and she began to get undressed. She was about to climb into her bed when the snake called out again, "Oh Oda, dearest Oda! Can't I get into bed with you?"

"This is too much!" cried Oda angrily. "My father brought you up to the front door, and I allowed you into my room, and now you want to get into bed with me? But you are freezing! All right, come here and get warm, you poor worm!"

Then good Oda stuck out her soft, warm hand and she picked up the cold snake, who had been enchanted for a long time and who could only be redeemed if everything could happen just as it had now happened. He was transformed into a handsome young prince, and he immediately took Oda as his wife.

- Source: Ludwig Bechstein, "Oda und die Schlange," *Ludwig Bechsteins Märchenbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von Georg Wigand, 1853), pp. 134-35.
- Bechstein's source: Karl Müllenhoff, "Ode und de Slang'," *Sagen, Märchen und Lieder der Herzogthümer Schleswig, Holstein und Lauenburg* (Kiel: Schwersche Buchhandlung, 1845), book 4, no. 1, p. 383.
- Translation © 1998 by D. L. Ashliman.
- Types 433C and 425, with strong similarities to type 440.
- Link to additional tales of type 440, Frog Kings: Folktales about Slimy Suitors.
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Return to D. L. Ashliman's **folktexts**, a library of folktales, folklore, fairy tales, and mythology.

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